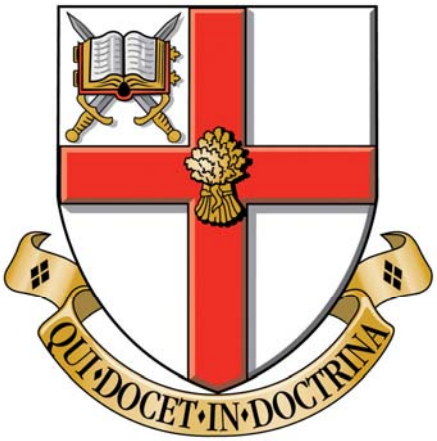

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Volume 1 of 2

The Writing of a Historical Novel (entitled *Chimera*), Together with an Analytical Commentary

Thesis submitted in accordance with
the requirements of the
University of Chester
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

by

Christine Anne Simon

August 2011

Volume 1:
Chimera

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Section 1:

Chimera (MA)

Chapters 1-15

These chapters are not intended
for assessment for the PhD.

There is no spy so good as a double one.

William Wickham

The phenomena of nature resemble the scattered leaves of the Sibylline prophecies; a word only, or a single syllable, is written on each leaf, which, when separately considered, conveys no instruction to the mind; but when, by the labor [*sic*] of patient investigation, every fragment is replaced in its appropriate connection, the whole begins at once to speak a perspicuous and a harmonious language.

Thomas Young

In the quantum world, what you see is what you get, and nothing is real; the best you can hope for is a set of delusions that agree with one another.

John Gribbin

Truth is the shattered mirror,
Strown in myriad bits, while each
Believes his little bit the whole to own.

Sir Richard F. Burton

Telling us so much
it so much the more
withholds. Who was he?

R. S. Thomas, ‘Dic Aberdaron’

1.

> Richard Turnbull – radical atheist, learned scrounger, linguist and literary aspirant – exemplifies that futile rebellion and refusal to conform to the social norms which achieves nothing of lasting value. By the standards of his own age as well as of ours, he was a simple failure.
>
> John Hunter, *Richard Turnbull,* 1958

The Blue Teapot in Clapham, a vibrant tearoom which served some of the finest organic soups, home-made sandwiches and cakes in London, had some two hundred years previously been the scene of a nasty incident. A plaque above the corner seat which looked out through dimpled bow windows onto a back-street explained that

> *From this seat in November 1812 Henri de Saint-Gilles, a French émigré, was arrested as a spy and taken to Newgate prison where he was later executed.*

During the short time of his incarceration in Newgate amongst foul-smelling common criminals, Henri de Saint-Gilles fervently rebutted the charges against him. He denounced with equal venom the Englishman who claimed to have brought him to justice. Richard Turnbull was an insidious, traitorous brute.

Saint-Gilles was hanged and beheaded on the morning of 31st January 1813, still protesting his innocence to the jeering crowd who turned out despite the bitter weather. His fate had no effect on the Blue Teapot's clientele; but now, two hundred years later, on dark, wet November nights after the café had closed, its proprietor Peter Marchmont greeted the ghost of Saint-Gilles with enthusiasm. They were old friends.

Peter Marchmont had bought the Blue Teapot because of its connection with Saint-Gilles. His enfeebled and decrepit mother having died at just the right moment – the only thing she had ever done to his benefit – Peter sold the comfortable house in Primrose Hill which had been in the family for generations and bought the three storeys which comprised the Blue Teapot and a small self-contained flat. The purchase left him with money in hand, but it was not enough for the serious pursuit of his hobby. He decided to run the café himself; a recourse which had the combined

advantages of cutting costs and avoiding the necessity of working too often with other people. He took to cooking as he had taken to no other job. It was, he discovered, an alchemy which demanded spiritual readiness, exactitude and cleanliness; qualities as natural in him as they were noticeably lacking in women, that messy, fluid half of the species who traditionally performed the task.

At seven-thirty Peter Marchmont, alone in his private kitchen, ate his tea of pumpkin soup, two granary rolls with butter, a slice of carrot cake topped with cream-cheese icing, and a cup of Earl Grey tea without milk. At eight o'clock he folded his napkin precisely, corner to corner, and mounted the uncarpeted stairs to his attic study, a windowless room accessible only through a concealed door; a dark womb to which he alone controlled access. On the antique mahogany desk at which he now sat, he had carefully arranged the writing paraphernalia of a nineteenth-century gentleman: two crystal ink wells, five quill pens in a cup, blotting sand and a stack of paper. He lit the two candles which stood in brass candlesticks, looked across to the empty chair on the other side of the desk.

What remains of a life once it is finished? Words, only words; that is all that remains of Richard Turnbull and Henri de Saint-Gilles. Faded ink on mottled paper. The written accounts have become flesh and blood; in them these men live for ever. That was why Peter so badly needed more of the Turnbull autobiography. But he was doing what he could to procure that; it was in God's hands now. Well, God's and Drue Paulin's. If you want a job doing properly, you have to be prepared to wait as well as pay, Drue had told him. Arrogant sod, but good at what he did. Which was why Peter was prepared to pay so much.

From a drawer he unlocked a sheaf of papers and a notebook. Five letters, for which he had paid two thousand pounds. A tattered notebook which, in a dingy basement bookshop off the Tottenham Court Road, had cost him next to nothing. Old Bill Sinclair hadn't known what he was selling, had hardly looked at the pile of books Peter had thrust under his nose. Heart not in it any more; just biding his time till he retired. Good job that hawk-eyed son of his hadn't been about. Forty pounds the lot, Bill had said, and Peter had paid up, his heart thumping, feigning nonchalance.

The letters had been a disappointment. A Georgian woman's prolix outpourings. A couple of references to Richard Turnbull, but nothing of any use. Tomorrow,

though, they might come in useful. Peter read them again, scanning for anything he might have missed.

> September 1810 I had not been in London above one week, when I realised how wise I had been to remove here. … My life here is as full as anyone could wish for – save for the presence of one. You know of whom I speak. … I am not certain, however, that he still resides in this city. He had the habit of travelling about the country.
>
> March 1814 You ask after my aunt, and I regret to inform you there is no improvement. She weakens daily. … What will become of me when she is no more? … Tom and Emily would have me live with them in Manchester, but I fear to become little more than a servant. It is not work I fear, Fanny, but the wearing down of my higher faculties … If I had but the money, I should set up a small school for the daughters of gentlemen.
>
> April 1814 It is my sad duty to inform you that my aunt Spencer breathed her last on Friday sevennight. … She departed this life with calm equanimity, trusting in the God she revered. Doctor Morris attended her last hours. … Edmund managed to return, before she lapsed into semi-consciousness … My aunt saw fit to leave me in her will a substantial sum of money; if I am frugal, this should prove sufficient to set up a school.
>
> February 1815 My school is now set up. I have five pupils this quarter … I have weathered great changes, but I am settled now. My life is ordered and regular.
>
> October 1825 I am quite content … Two weeks ago, I received a visit from Mr. Turnbull. Do you remember him, Fanny? … So many years ago now. He is little changed. … I have been somewhat indisposed of late – a cough which lingers – and the inclement weather has dispirited me.

2.

‘I will see you again, won’t I?’ He kissed her forehead, caressed her cheek. She smiled and, leaving the warmth of the bed, went to shower. Later, while she dried her hair, he brought her coffee, tidied her strewn clothes.

‘Do you have to go, Julia? You haven’t eaten.’

‘I’ve a meeting. It’s important.’ Then, picking up her coat, ‘Lock the door when you leave, Miles. I’ll ring you.’

It was dark already, the air chill, neon-orange pools reflected on the wet pavements. Eight-thirty, he’d said. She hurried through the early-evening crowds, took the bus to Deptford and the train to Greenwich; excited, a little afraid. She found him where he’d said he would be, in the crowded dining room of the Spanish Galleon.

‘John Selby?’ Grey hair, piggy brown eyes.

‘Miss Dalton.’ Without rising, he shook her hand. ‘Shall we order before we get down to business?’ It was not a question. When the food came he ate in silence for several minutes, his eyes on his plate, then asked, ‘So why choose Richard Turnbull for your PhD thesis?’

‘He’s interesting. Born around the time of the American Revolution, phenomenally intelligent, speaks umpteen languages but doesn’t want to work for a living or settle anywhere. Prefers wandering round the country using people’s libraries and cadging board and lodging in return for intellectual conversation and small unpaid commissions. In some ways a very modern figure: a dropout, an atheist, a maverick.’

‘And a traitor and a French spy!’

She was taken aback by his vehemence. ‘What evidence do you have for that?’

‘As yet, only circumstantial. I’m working on it. What do you have?’

‘A fragment of his autobiography. One of goodness knows how many. I thought it would be easier studying someone who’s so obscure – only two published works means there’s a market out there. But the downside is that the source material is scattered about the country. There could be any number of documents in archives and private collections, undiscovered.’

‘That’s why we need each other.’

‘Pool resources, you mean?’

‘Something like that.’

‘And what’s your interest in Richard Turnbull?’

‘Let’s say an old friendship. You said in your advertisement that you wanted information relating to Elizabeth Fitzroy.’

‘You’ve got information on Elizabeth Fitzroy?’

He aligned his knife and fork carefully so they were exactly parallel, folded his napkin corner to corner. ‘Five letters, written by her between 1810 and 1825, which I am prepared to exchange for your autobiography. Either permanently or for a set period – say one month. And we can each inform the other of any further information we come across.’

They agreed to meet in a week’s time. She hailed a cab in Creek Road and as it trundled down the A2 in now-pelting rain, leant her head against the cool window and thought about John Selby. There was something about him she didn’t like. Miles wouldn’t approve; like all detectives, he was suspicious of everyone. Selby could be anybody. But she’d run out of leads. He could be a psychopath for all she cared, as long as she got the information she wanted. In any case, she hadn’t shown him all her hand; she hadn’t mentioned the Fitzroy manuscript. Three weeks ago, under the hostile eye of an attendant in the Hankinson Museum in Manchester, she had spent two wet, cold and miserable hours poring over a page of Elizabeth Fitzroy’s journal.

When she got home from Greenwich she opened a bottle of Merlot, cleared the papers from her desk and reread the transcription she had made of that document. The original was a single sheet of paper covered on both sides with a frenetic scrawl, full of dashes and crossings-out, in places almost unreadable.

> Oct. 7th 1825 - I dined alone this evening, and took a glass of wine, for my stomach. I was in the drawing room at the old house in Manchester, warm by the fire, the candles lit, with Tom and Father, reading the *Edinburgh Review*. I relive each of the days of that winter. – Memories, outside time – like the journals I have kept, possess a life of their own. They are, however, but images of a dead reality – their existence an illusion, a piece of flotsam to which I cling in a cold and icy sea. I am outwardly a calm and contented schoolmistress of middling age. – But locked inside, hid from view, a turbulent chaos – this second more surely I than the other, the impostor. – And whom did Richard Turnbull see when he called this evening? He alone – Tomorrow I must rise again as principal of Miss Fitzroy’s Seminary for Young Ladies, Charles-square, but tonight I am that girl who learned Greek at his side. He had seen the

> advertisement for my school in the newspaper. He has been out of the country – has, it seems, been occupied with important work. The years have been kind to him, the lines upon his face not unbecoming, the same flint-grey coruscation in his eyes. – My own face ravaged by time and smallpox. – He the rose gone from bud to full bloom – I the flower withering already on its stem. Richard, Richard. – Once, – but no one knows, not even Tom – those moments my whole life. Now a plateau of steady employment, plain fare – but my life has described a curve – an ascent to a brief peak, followed by a great falling away. He was not made as other mortals – he must be free, bound to nothing. His work was his own, hidden, secret – dangerous work, he said – this went ill with his literary endeavours, but there was something in his nature, something inflexible and unfettered – his disposition was such that he might have turned out very good or very ill. – I am not sure how he has turned out. – And tonight – while a stillborn hope formed in my heart – while he held my hand in his a moment – he stood before me a stranger. – I inquired after his Lexicon – how I hoped, years ago, to help him with it! – It proceeds slowly, he said; much remains still to be done. – The same response he gave me fifteen years ago.

3.

On returning from Greenwich, Peter Marchmont went directly to his study. Safe in this shadowy, confined space, he could discard for a while the carefully-constructed mask of his daily life. Not here the overweight, ugly child taunted in playground and common room; nor the lumbering inarticulate boy his mother had punished for the pain of his father's abandonment. The galvanic memory of Joan Marchmont on her deathbed had only recently superseded that of Joan Marchmont sitting on the crushed velvet cushion of her dressing stool, her elegant sheer-stockinged thighs packed into a skirt of short Crimplene, applying cold cream, powder, rouge, mascara; back-combing her hair into an elaborate bouffant mound; an endless ritual which Peter, craning his head round the doorway, watched each evening with bewilderment. He knew that if she saw him she would turn, her pink lips a rictus of anger, and scream at him to get out, leave her alone. Before she went out she would graze the top of his head with a kiss as he lay, back turned, on the sofa. Mrs Seymour, the housekeeper, put him to bed. He pretended to sleep, but afterwards crept to his tiny playroom to read and sob by the light of a torch. Often he slept on the floor, waking before his

mother but not daring to enter her room for fear of bruising words and the sweet stench which permeated the room after her nights out.

He had constructed a prosthetic armour about himself, trained himself to articulacy, effaced himself from view. Only in his study did he lay his carapace aside. No prying eyes, no judgements within these walls. Here his fat fingers held a pen as skilfully as any man's, as he painstakingly reconstructed the story of Henri de Saint-Gilles and Richard Turnbull.

Saint-Gilles was innocent. He had been eliminated by Richard Turnbull, the double agent who had allegedly brought him to justice, for having discovered Turnbull's true identity. Peter Marchmont had made it his life's mission to liberate Saint-Gilles from the calumny and misjudgement he had suffered. All he needed was to produce the evidence.

William Montagu's 1848 memoir suggested that Turnbull might have got into France around the year 1794. Peter opened the *Memoir of Richard Turnbull* and found the passage.

> Robert Turnbull, in an effort to interest his son in employment of a productive nature, sent him at the age of 17 to an old business partner in London. For Richard the sojourn was replete with mixture. The long days in the manufactory at Catherine-street produced in him an acute depression of spirits; he was as little made for regularity and submission to superiors, as a wild horse is to the pulling of a plough. Yet he found such employment of another nature in the capital as to compensate fully for the pains of commerce. Town life so thrilled him with its plays, societies and opportunities for learning, above all its unceasing movement, that he came to call London his second home.
>
> Richard's stay in the metropolis was interrupted by the death of his father, and it was long before he returned. Some months after his father's interment, he set out upon a journey. I believe he spent some time upon the Continent; he may even have taken the foolhardy step of entering into France. His ability to speak the language was such that he could have passed for a native; and by his own admission he was reckless enough in those days. Yet, though I later formed with him the strongest of attachments, never could I prevail upon him to speak of those years.

Peter turned next to the autobiographical fragment in the notebook he had bought from Bill Sinclair. It contained one sentence which proved that Turnbull knew Paris. Not much, but it was a start.

> When I drew near to London in the year 1825, and stood looking down at the city from the village of Hampstead, I wondered that I had been so eager to leave it. The city affects me thus; sated, exhausted, spewed out by life's scintillating exuberance as much as by the filthy miasmas and stinking alleys, I long once more for green hills and birdsong, the myriad raindrop lenses upon a branch. Satiation being, however, a matter of contrast, I tire eventually of the country also, seek then the jostling crowds of the metropolis where the streets are never empty, never silent; where the ugly dirt of the rookery is as congenial to me as the beauty of the palace. Thus it is that I am obliged to remain in a state of flux between city and country. I belong nowhere. I belong everywhere.
>
> To this city I must always return. Even Paris, though its buildings are more fair, can not compare. Well is it named the metropolis, the mother city. I grew in her, learnt the secrets of life in her and, though I repudiate her, always I return. London takes the place of my earthly mother, who abandoned me. In her all things are conceived; the foul and pestilential as well as the high and noble, the monster as well as the saint.
>
> I lodged with a friend in Clapham, the scholar William Montagu, who was pleased to grant me a room in return for assistance in his current work. 'My translation of Lucan proceeds slowly, Dick,' he said; 'so much of my day is taken up with business of a less congenial nature.' By which he meant his commerce in the city, which uses up his time and his energy but which is necessary for the making of his living.
>
> I spent the days in his library, checking his translation. His hours of work being long, I worked also upon these my Memoirs, my Lexicon and my Treatise on Languages. That same year also I called once upon Miss Fitzroy, a lady whose acquaintance I had made twenty years before, when she dwelt at Manchester, and in whose father's house I had spent many a pleasant day and evening. I taught the rudiments of Greek to Miss Fitzroy and her brother Tom. Her father being now dead, Miss Fitzroy had removed to London and set up a school.

The rest of the notebook was blank.

4.

Could Richard Turnbull have been a French spy?

On 1st February, 1813, *The Times* had reported the execution the previous day of one Henri de Saint-Gilles. 'While still alive,' the article concluded,

> the prisoner was taken down from the scaffold and his bowels removed and burnt; his head was next severed from his body, and the body quartered; as befits that vilest of criminals, the TRAITOR.
>
> Mr Turnbull, earlier instrumental in the apprehension of this reprobate, attended the execution, and is to be congratulated on his renunciation of personal sensibilities in this affair.

The part played by Richard Turnbull, however, and the nature of his personal sensibilities, were not disclosed.

This was a matter of some interest to Julia Dalton, almost two centuries later, because it hinted at a link between Turnbull and Saint-Gilles which had entered the historical record. Julia had at first been inclined to reject John Selby's claims about Richard Turnbull; in the light of the newspaper's report, she realised the matter needed careful investigation.

It was important, she reflected, not to underestimate the atmosphere of confusion and suspicion produced in England by the French Revolution and the ensuing Napoleonic Wars. In a country racked by distrust and accusation, espionage and counter-espionage, no one was above suspicion. Even Wordsworth and Coleridge, in the summer of 1797, had been suspected of spying for the French, when all they were doing was roaming the countryside researching the *Lyrical Ballads*. Against this background, it was not impossible that Richard Turnbull, a maverick of avowed revolutionary ideals, should turn out to have been a French spy. That Julia did not like the idea was of no consequence. Her task was to establish the facts.

On the morning of her second meeting with John Selby, she reviewed those few facts she had at her disposal. Montagu, in his *Memoir of Richard Turnbull*, had touched on the episode with Saint-Gilles, but his account was frustratingly lacking in detail:

I first made acquaintance with Richard Turnbull in the year 1810. We met in Joseph Turner's coffee house in Green-street, in the village of Clapham where I have my residence. Out of our common passion for languages grew a friendship which ended only with Richard's death. Though he was the younger man, I looked up to him as to a brother, and his loss afflicts me still.

From the spring of 1810 and throughout 1811 Richard's life, like my own, was one of contentment and regularity. He lodged with his employer Mr Bellas; but his duties were not onerous, consisting most often of errands to London and of help with Mr Bellas's experiments; he therefore had ample leisure. It was through Mr Bellas that he was introduced into Lord Alexander's circle, and he frequently spent the evenings of the season dining in town. Never one to follow the dictates of others, and not averse to sleeping in a ditch when the fancy took him, Richard could be charming enough when he chose; his wit and intellectual power – and even his trenchant honesty, which cut like a sabre – meant that he was a valued guest and had Lord Alexander's protection.

It was this connexion – Lord Alexander being a relation of Lord Castlereagh, who was then the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs – which led to the upheaval in Richard's life early in 1812.

One afternoon in May, while I was quietly dining off a leg of mutton, Richard burst into the room, spattered with mud, having ridden from town on one of Lord Alexander's horses. His hair had come loose from its ribbon and his blue eyes were ablaze. Flinging himself into a chair, he said, in a voice of feigned lightness,

'I am to leave Clapham at first light tomorrow.'

'What? My dear fellow, I understood you to be settled here!'

'Indeed I am; more settled, and happy, than ever I thought I could be. But this is a time of war, and a man must serve his country howsoever he can.'

'Good God, man; you're not going to join the army!'

He smiled. 'You know as well as I, William, that I have not the docility to take orders, especially from those less educated than I. No; I have been called upon to perform a service of some gravity for Lord Alexander which will take me from here – I know not for how long. I plan to return, however, upon conclusion of the matter. I know I can rely on you, Will, to say nothing of this to anyone. Come, give me a glass, and we will toast our friendship.'

He left the next day, in excellent spirits, and I had no doubt that he would return the same carefree fellow that had left. It was late November before I saw him again; and it was obvious, that a shadow had crossed him. The public's knowledge of this sorry and painful affair allows me to draw a veil over it; I will say only that Richard,

> notwithstanding that he comported himself with the utmost of honour, was much distressed by the part he was made to play in it.

The trial of Henri de Saint-Gilles, for high treason, took place in late January 1813. It was a complex business, with many witnesses called on both sides. To her excitement, Julia had recently found the trial transcript on the internet; it was long and heavy-going, but it might well prove to be the richest source of illumination on the matter.

She hurriedly tidied her desk, stacked her cup and bowl in the dishwasher and left for work. Her flat, four rooms at the top of a Victorian house in New Cross, belonged to her aunt Tricia, her mother's sister. Widowed after thirty-two years of marriage, Tricia had packed her bags and set off, alone, for Australia; in search, she said, of a little excitement in her life. She had lent Julia the flat, at a very reasonable rent, for as long as she wanted it. To cover her outgoings, Julia taught French and English three days a week at the Brunswick Academy, a language school in Lambeth. By getting up at six every morning and eating her bran flakes at her desk, she managed to snatch an hour of work before she left.

She set out early for Greenwich that evening. She needed to walk, to feel her feet pound the pavement. Exhilarated by the rough wind on her face, the numberless people she crossed but did not touch, the constant rush of the traffic, she let go, felt her mind relax. Outside Deptford Town Hall a young man, Bible in hand, shouted words of encouragement, or reprobation, which collided with the wind and disappeared, unheeded.

She saw Selby, who once again had arrived before her, at a table by the window. He waited till she had settled opposite him, then handed her a brown envelope.

'The letters. Elizabeth Fitzroy. As promised.'

Julia had brought – also in a brown envelope – a copy of her autobiographical fragment. She had owned the original, written on the end-papers of an ancient edition of Hazlitt's *Table Talk* which had once belonged to Richard Turnbull, since she was eighteen. The book had been a gift from her piano teacher when she left for university. Not valuable, Miss Yeats had said, but there was a surprise in it. Julia had spent hours deciphering the untidy handwriting at the back of the book, such a contrast to the copperplate regularity of the name 'Richard Turnbull' inscribed on the

title page. She had spent more hours just staring at it, dizzied by the layers of time it represented. These pages had been this man's now; his flesh-and-blood hands, holding open the book, had formed this close-written scribble interspersed with occasional curlicues and flourishes. But this distillate of the past was itself a lens on an anterior time; a subjective account, formed through the distorting glass of memory, of his past.

'Tell me,' she said, staring Selby in the eyes, 'why you believe Richard Turnbull to have been a spy.'

'You are familiar, I suppose, with Montagu's *Memoir*?'

'Of course! But it says little about the affair.'

'Exactly. It's what he omits which is significant. Montagu was protecting his friend. The trial proves the extent of Turnbull's involvement.'

'But Saint-Gilles was convicted.'

'As the outsider, he was always going to be.' Selby leant forward, placed his arms on the stained table between them. Julia moved her stool back a little. He continued, 'Saint-Gilles flees the Terror in 1793, arrives in London with nothing but the clothes he stands up in and a few books salvaged from his château. He is a liberal, educated man. He earns a living giving French and dancing lessons, like many of his compatriots; later settles in Clapham where, in 1810, Richard Turnbull lands up and befriends him.'

'What?'

Selby smiled. 'Yes, Miss Dalton, they were friends. For a couple of years. Then, in 1812, Turnbull goes off on his "service of some gravity". Tracking down the spy – allegedly. Spying on his own account. It all depends on how you read it. Then, when he's rumbled, he turns the tables and frames Saint-Gilles.'

'Forgive me for banging on about evidence; but do you have anything at all to back up these assertions?'

'Your scepticism is laudable, Miss Dalton. I will contact you when I am in a position to share my evidence with you.'

They shook hands and Julia left. It was not yet ten o'clock. She tried to ring Miles; he didn't answer his house phone and his mobile was switched off. In any case, she wanted to read the letters. Elizabeth, unlike Richard, had left so little behind her. She hurried to the station.

5.

The trial of Henri Jacques de Saint-Gilles, for High Treason

30th January 1813

I.

The prisoner, being set to the bar, pleaded Not Guilty to the indictment of High Treason.

Mr. Joseph Barclay was sworn, and examined by Mr. Ludlow for the Crown.

Mr Ludlow:	What is your business?
Joseph Barclay:	I am a sea-captain. I own a cutter, a fine vessel, as fast on a wind as any of her class.
Mr. Ludlow:	And where do you live?
Joseph Barclay:	At Dover.
Mr Ludlow:	And what business do you make with your vessel?
Joseph Barclay:	I deliver goods under commission. I have also worked for the Excise.
Mr Ludlow:	Have you recently delivered goods for a Monsieur LeConte?
Joseph Barclay:	I have. Over a period of about two years, from the summer of 1810, I delivered letters for Mr LeConte, from Dover to Boulogne and Calais. On occasion I carried packets back from those places.
Mr Ludlow:	And when did you discontinue this delivery of letters?
Joseph Barclay:	In October of 1812.
Mr Ludlow:	How were the letters carried to you?
Joseph Barclay:	I received them from M. LeConte or one of his gentlemen at an address in London.
Mr Ludlow:	What was that address?
Joseph Barclay:	Number 7, Litchfield-street.
Mr Ludlow:	M. LeConte’s residence?
Joseph Barclay:	At the time I presumed so. I have since learnt that it was not his residence, but an address used to conduct this business.
Mr. Ludlow:	You travelled to London to receive the letters?
Joseph Barclay:	Yes.

Mr Ludlow: And how much were you paid by M. LeConte?

Joseph Barclay: 25 or 30 pounds a trip for the safe delivery of the letters. The London coach was paid for me.

Mr Ludlow: To whom were these letters addressed?

Joseph Barclay: To different people. I merely had to deposit them with the harbour master at Boulogne or Calais.

Mr Ludlow: And why did you stop taking these commissions?

Joseph Barclay: I became aware of their contents. I had been told by M. LeConte that the letters related to French prisoners and exiled noblemen in this country; that they were intended to bring comfort to their families. In March of 1812, I was asked by M. LeConte to carry a large number of letters. One of these was badly sealed and came open. I was shocked by what I read.

Mr Ludlow: What did you read?

Joseph Barclay: I found information concerning the readiness for war of the troops in the garrison at Dover.

Mr Ludlow: And then?

Joseph Barclay: I opened further of the letters, to see if they contained information of the same nature.

Mr Ludlow: And?

Joseph Barclay: It was so. Lists of ships in the ports, with details of men and guns and victuals. Lists of the garrisons likewise.

Mr Ludlow: How did you proceed?

Joseph Barclay: I came up to London. I saw M. LeConte. I said I was no longer prepared to carry letters for him, and demanded the money I was owed. I was determined to have no more to do with this affair.

Mr Ludlow: What was his reply?

Joseph Barclay: That if I ceased to work with him, he would expose me as an accomplice.

Mr Ludlow: Where in London did you meet with M. LeConte?

Joseph Barclay: At the house in Litchfield-street.

Mr Ludlow: Look at the prisoner in the dock. Have you ever seen him at number 7, Litchfield-street?

Joseph Barclay: No. I have never seen the prisoner before. At Litchfield-street I saw only M. LeConte and his assistant M. Grosmont.

Mr Ludlow: And what did you do after M. LeConte had threatened you with exposure?

Joseph Barclay: I called upon Mr Stephen Barber.

Mr Ludlow: Who is Mr Barber?

Joseph Barclay: He is the brother of the husband of my daughter. A very clever young fellow. He is a clerk in the Office of one of the Secretaries of State. I reckoned he would be able to help me, since he has connexions in the government.

Mr Ludlow: Were you not frightened by M. LeConte's threat?

Joseph Barclay: I have served in His Majesty's navy. I have seen death at close quarters. I will not be threatened by a French traitor.

Mr Ludlow: And what happened next?

Joseph Barclay: I kept delivering the letters.

Mr Ludlow: The same as before?

Joseph Barclay: But before I took them to France, I took them to a gentleman in London.

Mr Ludlow: Do you recall the gentleman's name?

Joseph Barclay: It was Mr. Nicholas Gurney.

Mr Ludlow: And what did you do with the letters?

Joseph Barclay: I delivered them to the house of Mr. Gurney and they were returned to me one or two days later.

Mr Ludlow: And during this time you remained in London?

Joseph Barclay: Yes. I was given lodgings, with Mrs. Salt. A most obliging hostess, if I may say so. And not just on account of her mutton pies.

Mr Ludlow: By all accounts. Do you know what happened to the letters you thus surrendered?

Joseph Barclay: I do not know. I presumed they were examined.

Mr Ludlow: And when you received the letters back from Mr. Gurney, what did you do with them?

Joseph Barclay: I returned to Dover and carried them to France as I was directed.

6.

> When in the north of England, Richard lodged often with his friend Charles Heywood, a gentleman of some means who lived with his wife and six children outside Penrith. The two had met at the Appleby horse fair of 1802, when Richard saved Heywood from laying out a large sum of money on a bad horse; they remained friends until 1816. On his last visit to Bank House, Richard disagreed with Heywood over a trifle; but, each being the sort of man not to give way, the quarrel remained unresolved and Richard never returned.
>
> William Montagu, *Memoir of Richard Turnbull*

Bank House still stood, five miles north of Penrith. According to its website, it was currently undergoing refurbishment before being opened to the public late in 2011. Julia rang the number on the website and made enquiries. The new owner, a friendly woman named Dot Kenton, had bought the house with her husband using his redundancy package; they'd sold their house in Berkshire; she had worked for the National Trust and so knew about these things; they intended to make a go of it as a local attraction, bring in school groups and the Women's Institute and so on; it was important to do a good marketing job. Yes, in fact she had found a great many papers, in the old library, such a jumble, but she hadn't had time to look at them properly yet. Richard Turnbull? The name did ring a bell. So much stuff, you know. If Julia wanted to come up and see the papers, could she perhaps look at them, put them in some sort of order, assess their importance; how did that sound? Yes, the first week in March would be fine.

Julia arranged three days' leave of absence from the Academy. Then she rang her mother, said she was coming to stay for a few days. Bank House was less than twenty miles from her childhood home and the visit to her parents was long overdue. It made sense to combine both tasks, though it did not make the idea any more palatable.

She drove to Thoresbeck in a hired Ford Ka. Nora Dalton, just returned from evensong, stood in the hallway next to the old teak bureau on which Julia used to do her homework. Removing her hat, she proffered her powdery and wrinkling cheek, waiting for the regulation kiss, pursing her own red-smeared lips in return. In the

narrow sitting room, Julia greeted her father and poured a gin and tonic at the sideboard. The smell of cigarette smoke scratched at the back of her throat. The photograph beside the drinks tray showed her mother, framed in time, looking out with a smile and blessing God for her late miracle, the baby Julia in her arms. And Julia, even as she fervently hoped that she would not become her mother (just twelve years till she was forty!) knew that the smile accused and that she was a disappointment.

A late-conceived child whose parents were now approaching seventy, Julia saw in her mother's ideals of womanhood – nice man, marriage, children – at best tenuous joys, at worst hideous constraints. Aware of her mother's longing for a grandchild, for fond conspiratorial chats about cooking and washing and the irritating habits of men, she could match it only with ill-concealed contempt. Her father said little, walked noiselessly round the house in his patterned carpet slippers, aloof from the simmering volcanics of the women.

Nora lit a cigarette, slowly breathed out a trail of smoke. Her eyes sparkled with pleasure.

'It's so lovely to see you, darling. And how's work?'

'Beginning to take off. There's a lot to do. Finding material at Bank House has been a real boost.'

'I meant your teaching.'

'Oh, that. It funds the PhD. But I'd rather I didn't have to do it.'

'You can't be a student for ever, you know.'

'I know that. Unfortunately.'

'Clarissa's had another pay rise. Thirty-eight thousand now.'

'How wonderful for Clarissa.'

'Why don't you talk to her when you've finished your studies? She'd be only too happy to help you find a job.'

'In an advertising agency?'

'It's good money.'

'It's not what I want to do. Is she still with that prick? The chief executive?'

'Don't be rude, Julia! Harry's a nice man. They're getting married next July, we're all invited. Auntie Poppy's bought her outfit already. She's so excited, she can't wait. Such a gorgeous hat; floppy brim, in cream, with a terracotta ribbon. To match the suit. You will come, won't you?'

‘Actually,’ said Julia, ‘I wouldn’t be sorry if I never saw Clarissa again.’

Sunday afternoon visits – Auntie Poppy and Uncle James with darling Clarissa, fair-haired and winsome – had in Julia’s memory the same level of significance as her recurrent childhood nightmares. She still occasionally had the nightmares, but at least her life was free of Clarissa. Once, during Sunday tea, Clarissa had picked up Julia’s hardback copy of *David Copperfield*, bought with pocket money saved over weeks, and danced around the dining room with it.

‘What’s this? Is it a love story? Julia’s reading a love story!’ She riffled through the book, opened it at random and read aloud to the assembled adults the account of the death of David’s mother, in such a way that it became a comic turn; rolling her eyes, making exaggerated gestures and declaiming the words in a high-pitched, singsong voice. Everyone laughed till the tears ran down their cheeks, except Julia, who was scolded for not having a sense of humour.

‘Come on, Julia,’ Auntie Poppy had said. ‘Eat something. You’re too skinny for your own good. It must be all that reading.’ And everyone laughed again. Reading was blamed for many things in the Dalton household. It made children – especially girls – lazy and antisocial.

Bank House, explained Dot Kenton at nine-thirty the next morning, was a seventeenth-century farmhouse with later additions. Dot, a large woman with a frizz of dyed-blond hair who wore a loose blouse over a denim skirt, led the way down a corridor to a steamy kitchen.

‘This is the newest part of the house, built in the late nineteen-hundreds. And this is my husband, Ken.’ She gestured to a tall, balding man who sat on a threadbare settee opposite an Aga.

‘I’ll leave you to it, then,’ he said, folding up the *Daily Telegraph.* ‘That crossword’s done me in. Dot’s the brains round here; I just do as I’m told.’

‘He used to be a research chemist,’ said Dot as she prepared coffee. ‘They messed him about something awful in his last job. He had a breakdown, they made him redundant, then wouldn’t pay up. We had to get a solicitor. Got the money out of the bastards in the end, but I lived on one meal a day for months. We’re far happier now. We can do more or less what we want here.’ She handed Julia a mug of coffee, strong and bitter. ‘So what about this fella you’re so interested in?’

‘Richard Turnbull? He was a friend of Charles Heywood’s, an itinerant. He stayed with friends and acquaintances, but wasn’t always on very friendly terms with them. He quarrelled with Charles as well after a while.’

‘I’m interested. The more we know about Charles Heywood and his circle, the better. I’ll show you the library.’

It was small and cold, the books untidily shelved and in poor condition.

‘The house had been neglected for years. The last owner had no interest in it, that’s why it was so run down. But we couldn’t have afforded it otherwise. Look, I’ve put all the papers over here.’ She indicated a pile of tattered box files. ‘I’ve not had time to do anything with them. It’s only a coincidence that one of the first ones I looked at happened to have Turnbull’s name on. You’d be doing me a great favour if you could sort them out.’

Julia opened the top box briefly, noticed with a skip of the heart Richard’s signature, the tail of the R extending into an ornate flourish.

‘You can stay as long as you like,’ said Dot. ‘I’ve got to go and see the bank manager about a loan for the structural work on the tower. That could take all morning.’

Julia, glad to be on her own, started on the first box. Slightly dismayed at the sheer number of documents, she worked solidly till Dot popped her head round the door at one o’clock.

‘Come and have some lunch. You must be freezing in here.’ Over their tinned vegetable soup and bread rolls, Dot said, ‘It could be a gold mine, this place. There’s money in history these days. We’re converting the old stable into a tea-room and shop. If you’ve got any ideas for merchandise, let me know. We’re not sure what to do with the library.’

It took Julia two days to sort the documents into approximate order. There were receipts, invitations, recipes, notes of sermons (many of the Heywoods had gone into the church) and letters from the early nineteenth century up to the nineteen-fifties. She skim-read and sorted, bundled and labelled, working methodically until everything was in order. Only then did she spread out on the dusty table the sheets written by Richard Turnbull. Numerous letters to Charles Heywood, several pages of autobiography, a few miscellaneous pieces and a notebook, spineless and battered.

On her last day, Julia kissed her mother goodbye with something approaching affection and arrived at Bank House shortly after nine. She took morning coffee with Dot but worked through the rest of the day without a break.

Richard Turnbull was a prolific letter writer, often humorous and satirical, occasionally gossipy.

> Lord Harker is grown fat as a pig. When he sat next to Mrs Taylor at dinner yesterday, he quite eclipsed her, his fat thigh & elbow encroaching so far upon her Place that she was as good as trapped. When – desirous not to give offence – she attempted to move her chair discreetly towards her other neighbour, Captain Whitaker, she was quite prevented; his foot was upon her dress! But the poor Lady's face which before had been a picture of Consternation, grew more horrified still when he began to slurp down his soup, and belch like any common bumpkin. This is Mrs Taylor's first season in Town – and she has much to learn about society Manners. No doubt the poor lady thought she would rub shoulders with Superior Beings; perhaps expected a little interesting conversation; of which illusions she was quickly disabused. She is moreover totally unaware that Lord H's appetite for food is not his most fearsome. God have mercy upon her!
>
> Whitaker thought her the most delightful creature, though, like most Ladies, she revealed herself to be all Delicacy and no brains, though a pretty enough face. Why is it, that Women are for the most part such silly, affected creatures? There are few exceptions; yet those there are demonstrate what the Sex is capable of. I knew a woman once who, had her education been continued as it had started, might have become my Equal.

The autobiographical pages were difficult to date. Although Turnbull had stated his intention 'to write my life, from beginning to end', the writing had been neither linear nor complete. He wrote on anything: loose sheets of paper, notebooks, the backs of letters he had received, the flyleaves of books – his own or his friends' – and often abandoned the documents where he had written them. How many pieces of his work were scattered about the country – many surely destroyed – it was impossible to tell. One foolscap sheet held several notes:

> Whither memories? They exist not outside the Mind, yet they are real, an afterlife of experience.

Born at Manchester in the Year 1774.

My Father's house. —
Walls, constraints. Enclosures, Barriers
Cross not this border.
Death — the last boundary?

Took only my fiddle, my flageolet, a few books. And her letter.

I have had in me always a need, an instinct, to roam, to let no Place fix me. To cross the threshold. — — (of all Things).
Settled once —

The letters contained accounts of Turnbull's wanderings. Between 1802 and 1810 he was travelling the length and breadth of the country, often sleeping rough; a happy-go-lucky young man, an opportunist, full of hope and fun. Between 1810 and 1812 he was living in Clapham. From 1812 to early 1813 there was a gap, after which the letters began again; but they were terse and sad, as if a spark had gone out of him.

4th April 1813

Dear Charles,

I have of late been subject to a most awful bout of fever, vomiting and diarrhoea. My Bowels still weak. Two weeks ago I thought I had not long to live, and prepared to take leave of this world, but my Constitution had the better of me. Montagu's physician, thinking me as close to death as I thought myself, administered in turn all the benefits of his Pharmacopoeia – first Henbane, then Laudanum – which had a beneficial but only too temporary effect – and, last of all, threw Caution to the winds and gave me a few grains of the Bhang which he had procured from his wife's father, an eminent physician who tends Sir Jeremy Bowman. But there is nothing to cure what really ails me. The waters of Lethe exist not. I have been dealt a body-blow and I must endure as best I can. I sow misfortune on all I touch. I am the *Heautontimoroumenos*, the Executioner of Self.

Two days ago I called upon Mr Leigh Hunt in the gaol at Horsemonger Lane. He bears up tolerably well under his sentence, though somewhat agitated by the dreadful Noise of the place. The similarity and the difference of our Situations forced itself upon

me, and I came away inclined rather to envy than to pity him; imprisoned, certainly, within four walls – yet free of mind and conscience, his sentence of fixed duration. My own an imprisonment of mind and Heart, and indefinite. Yet how otherwise could I have acted?

I had thought to be away from this place long since – this locus an Anathema, tho' Montagu is life itself to me. As soon as I am well, I shall set out; until such time as I may see you again, God bless you, Charles, and your friend the unfortunate

Richard Turnbull.

'How are you doing? Anything interesting?' Dot's bulk filled the doorway.

'Bogged down. There's such a lot. I'll never read all this in a day. I could do with coming back another time – if that's possible?'

'Well, I've been thinking. If you're prepared to do some work for us, we might come to some arrangement. I thought, if you could design a display on Charles Heywood and Richard Turnbull for the exhibition room, and write a section for the guide book, that sort of thing, we could give you access to the Turnbull papers for a while, a fortnight perhaps. There's a little room you could sleep in downstairs. That would free me up to deal with other things, and give you time to study the manuscripts.'

It sounded too good to be true. By the time she left on Wednesday evening, Julia had it arranged. Having used most of her holiday allowance from the Academy, she would take unpaid leave under the pretext that her mother was ill and needed care. Her already meagre savings would dwindle, but that couldn't be helped. She could work during the day on the manuscripts and in the evenings write the material for Bank House. She returned to the Academy for a week, arranged cover for her classes, and was back in Cumbria on the following Monday morning.

7.

Wearing heat-proof gloves, Peter Marchmont removed a metal can from his oven and positioned it carefully on a trivet. Into the hot sand inside it he thrust six goose quills. Five minutes later he removed them and polished each in turn with a piece of rough flannel. This done, he carried them upstairs and laid them out on a board on his desk. With a sharp penknife he began to cut a nib on the first quill. It was a delicate job

which demanded a steady hand and to which he gave his full attention. He had been surprised, on making his first pen six months ago, by the intricacy of the task. So much practice had been needed, so many feathers wasted before he got it right. There had been the additional problem of cutting exactly the right size and shape of nib; by dogged trial and error, he had found that the handwriting style he required was best achieved with a very fine nib cut on a left-handed quill.

Peter enjoyed the slow evolution, under his now-skilled fingers, of this implement simple in form, insubstantial almost, but capable of producing matter of weight and complexity. We have lost, he thought, the concept of process, of progress towards a goal. That which can be bought instantly has no history, no provenance, and therefore no value. It can be discarded, tossed aside, as soon as something newer arrives on the scene. Like fast food it does not satisfy. A man needs to have around him things – artefacts, possessions – which derive from his history and to which he has a lifelong relationship, so that they become a part of his experience.

Gently he filed the nib, smoothing it till it was ready for writing. Feather to quill, nib to paper; thus he would weave a tissue of words to reshape and heal the past. The act of writing – the physical scrawling on the page of this hand which was both not his and intimately his – was both a shriving and an act of transformation.

The first pen finished, he tested it on a sheet of ordinary paper. An idiosyncratic, close scribble, full of undotted ‘i’s, uncrossed ‘t’s and flourishing capital Rs. It came naturally now; he was ready. The paper warmly reflected the light of the candle flames. Peter copied for practice a letter written by Richard Turnbull:

> Dear Cavanagh
>
> I reached London by the evening coach on Thursday, though I intend not to stay long. It is incumbent upon me to walk. A craving for solitude – which is the essence of Wandering – overtakes me, as certainly as at other times I need the ordered Turbulence of society, the conversation of friends, the tohu-bohu of the Crowds. I have need of the thoughts that only hours of walking can liberate; as my eyes dwell on the majestic calm of the mountains; as I sit at eventide at the edge of a field and hear the cows chomp the grass, the scream of a solitary Peacock; as colour fades and darkness envelops the landscape.
>
> I have come to London only to pay my respects to Mrs. Hanbury, the recent widow of a gentleman acquaintance of my father’s, with whom I lodged when a young man, and whose kindness I sore tried by my youthful obstinacy. Mrs H. is much changed,

but still full of gentleness. I took a dish of Tea with her, and she asked what I did for a livelihood.

'In truth, Madam, I can hardly answer that question,' I replied; 'except that I do what pleases me. I travel, I walk. I read and write. I go where I want, I answer to no one.' She looked at me with fond exasperation, as she had used to do long ago, and said, 'But what do you do for income, Richard?' I hastened to explain, lest she think – Heaven forbid! – that I intended to sponge money from her, that I earn a little by my literary commissions – and a little more from my writing for the Review – and that I am happy, my Freedom being my greatest treasure.

On Thursday last, I had the great good fortune to be taken to the Royal Society by Mr Joseph Osborne, where we attended a lecture given by Thomas Young on the Phaenomenon of light – this thing which cannot be seen but which illuminates – I was to have written *all,* but there is that which Light does not illuminate and which exists only in Darkness. It is Dr Young's belief that Light – like the infinite Sea – has the form of a wave. A fine fellow, and exceeding clever; yet greatly enabled by his vast fortune. His demonstration …

A frenetic knocking sounded from the street below. Peter, realising after some time that it came from his own front door, snuffed out the candles, locked the door behind him and ran down the stairs. The peephole showed a handsome black face, a muscular neck encased in a shirt collar and tie. He unlocked the door and pulled back the bolts one by one, but with haste; that chewing of the lower lip betokened an impatience which, once aroused, would erupt crushingly. Peter could not stomach displays of anger; Drue Paulin's could be brutal.

'Hey, man, you been asleep or something?' Drue's accent was a disconcerting mix of cockney and Jamaican. His father had sailed from Kingston in the early fifties, leaving behind the dazzling sun and dusty pavements of his homeland, and spent the rest of his life in the drizzly grey of an East End which bore the memory and the scars of the Blitz. He died of a stroke in 1985, mercifully not living to see his son's choice of profession.

'You don't have to hammer quite so loud. Anyone could hear.' With a shiver of anticipation, Peter noticed the attaché case at Drue's side.

'I'm a rep., come to show you my new range of kitchenware. That's what I told the old bat next door.' Drue followed Peter up the polished stairs into his kitchen.

'You got any of that cake I like?'

'Which one? The wholemeal carrot or the rich fruit? You seemed to like both last time.'

'Now I'm spoilt for choice. I'll have …' He hesitated, eyes bright with anticipation. The carrot cake got that cream cheese icing on? Yeah? I'll have that. And a nice pot of tea. Strong. Milk and sugar. Tea, man, it's the only thing that keeps out the chill of this English rain.'

Peter suspected that Drue's Jamaican identity, like his accent, was a concoction. The man had, after all, lived most of his life in London. He fetched a large slice of cake from the café kitchen. It was no good hurrying Drue; he had to be humoured. There were financial negotiations to be undertaken. Besides, there was something almost touching about sitting patiently at his dining table while Drue stuffed his face with cake and drank tea from a Royal Albert cup, his little finger cocked absurdly. If only he's got what I want.

Drue wiped his mouth on his paper napkin.

'That was heaven, man! Where'd you learn to bake cakes like that? Better than my old Ma, bless her.' He still visited his mother once a week in the nursing home in Bethnal Green. 'Now let's see what I got for you.' He lifted up the case onto the table. Peter's stomach lurched, but his face was blank.

An hour later, he climbed the stairs again; slowly, reverently, a thick sheaf of papers in his arms. Drue had excelled himself. Peter had quibbled over the money for form's sake; the price had been reasonable for what was on offer. He ran his palm softly over the paper, as if to draw forth an exhalation of the past.

'Well, Henri my friend, things are looking up,' he said, addressing the empty chair opposite his desk. He cleared away his handwriting practice and spread out the documents. 'Turnbull was free with his pen, we can say that for him. Four autobiographical pieces – two of them over ten pages long. Letters, various. Notes for the *Treatise on Languages*. Several pages of Greek and Latin. More letters.'

Late into the night Peter read, his candles burning low.

Sunday evening, 18. November 1810, Clapham

My dear Beaumont

I have been settled here for several months – much to my Surprize – you well know my aversion to staying in one place. There is, however, much here to my advantage. I am lodged in this pleasant Village at the home of Mr Robert Bellas, who

employs me as Amanuensis & Factotum – for which services he pays me handsomely. Having no family – his wife died ten years ago of a fever – Mr Bellas contents himself with affairs of State and scientific work. His purpose in employing me was, I suspect, to have at his disposal someone with whom he may talk on matters which are of interest to him – an Arrangement which suits us both; for he is a man whose knowledge and discerning tastes are matched only by his kindness and Benevolence.

My generous allowance permits me to repay my Debt to you, & I have therefore sent, by Mr. Ephraim Fairfax, who set out for Manchester yesterday, the 10£ note of which you have no doubt long since despaired. I send also a copy of The Leviathan, which I offer in gratitude for your Friendship. I had it from Mr Ackermann's in the Strand, where I met, by chance, Mr Coleridge, a gentleman much different from the Idea I had formed of him. A poet of fearsome Intellect, but not untouched by human cares or Weaknesses; which inclines me rather towards him. We discussed nigh on an hour (taking shelter from the rain, which lashed against the window panes) the nature and origin of Man's soul – on which points, as you may imagine, we differed greatly, but without Rancour.

I go often to London, both on business for Mr Bellas and on my own account. I have been invited to dine with several of his acquaintance – his sphere includes men of Government as well as of Learning – he is well connected due to his work in the office of the Secretary of State. I am welcomed in these Circles – imagine Beaumont! I, a Jacobin at heart, & a wandering Nobody to boot, welcomed amongst lords and Men of state. If I were not so near the end of this paper, I would tell you a tale or two; but must reserve that pleasure until such time as I write you again; until then I remain,

with sincere Respect

R. Turnbull

Thursday morning –

My dear Burnet

I – who am unaccustomed to move amongst the Dressy and expensive – was much amused by your Dinner party yesterday. If I may make so bold as to suggest an Improvement for future such Events – you might increase the Pleasure of certain of your guests, by inviting some who have Wit as well as Fortune. Yours, R.T.

Dear Miss Fitzroy — I thank you for your kind invitation, & accept with both joy and alacrity. You may be assured, that I shall wing myself, like Phaethon, to your doorstep at seven-thirty precisely this evening, scrubbed and dressed so as to create the most favourable impression with your Aunt, to whom I beg to be remembered.

Friday afternoon, 2 o'clock

Dear Banks

Fear not, I shall be at your house at 9 or 10 of the clock tomorrow, at which time we shall be able to discuss which of your poems to include in the volume. Since I shall have walked the full distance from this village – I am presently in some distress and have not the wherewithal to take the Coach – may I suggest that a fair recompense for the joy of my Company & the advantages of my intellect will be: 1st, a Dish of tea; 2nd, a large portion of Mrs. Greig's plum pudding; and 3rdly, that I may dine with you tomorrow afternoon before returning here. I promise you, that I shall wear my best – *id est*, my other – breeches and coat, AND that I will not on this occasion affright your household with tales of War and Revolution; if, however, you consider me unworthy to grace your dining room – I shall happily sit at a corner in the kitchen and fill my stomach with Mrs G's scraps.

My best respects to Mrs Banks and to the little pudding Robert.

R. T.

February 1st, 1813

My dear Elizabeth,

I write to you with Chagrin, and for the last time, in great agitation of mind, –

I have done that which is applauded as a great and noble Deed – have been congratulated in drawing room and tavern – but to me it is an Act as foul & hateful as it was necessary –

Can we ever truly know another? I thought I knew a man – with whom I shared many a pleasant conversation, and a jug of Claret – and then –

May God forgive me, Judas!

I am sullied by this act. I have betrayed a friend.

I leave tomorrow, if my Health hold. London and its environs are no longer to my taste, and those whom I love are best without me. I travel North; the sole hope I have of silencing the tumult in my head is to walk over fields and hills, to sleep beneath the stars, so to pommel my body that I forget who I am and what I have done.

I – the old I – the new is not to be known – wish you well. With sincerest good-wishes & Respect, believe me, ~~who in different Times might have been something~~

your Friend, the unfortunate Richard Turnbull.

'Well, my friend,' said Peter quietly, 'we have him, by his own admission.'

8.

After ten days at Bank House, Julia had transcribed less than half the material. She had enquired about photocopying, but Dot was against it. On the Thursday evening she was finishing the information for the guide book when there was a brief knock; Dot poked her head round the door.

'Got a minute, dear?' She sat on the narrow bed, her hands in her lap, her head on one side. 'Ken and I have come to a decision. We're going to have to sell the papers. And the library as a matter of fact.'

'Oh. But …'

'It makes sense. We need the money to put into the rest of the house. The library won't attract people. We need thirty thousand to repair the tower, and the bank will only lend us half. Nobody wants to come and look at old books and papers.'

'But …'

'In fact we've got someone lined up for the Turnbull papers already. A collector, I think. I wouldn't have said they were worth much, but you were obviously interested in them, so I thought why not someone else with more money? Stroke of luck that was, you turning up. And sorting them out for me.'

'But they'll be lost.'

'To be honest, that's not my concern. We're running a business here.'

'How much are you asking for them?'

'Six thousand. As I said, we've had an offer. Nearly bit our hand off. He's coming up next Wednesday to view the papers. Just had an email from him.' She wafted a sheet of paper at Julia.

Julia could not hope to raise six thousand pounds in less than a week. But the alternative was to let the papers go.

'What if …' She was thinking on her feet now, never her strong point; she felt sick. 'What if I paid you for some of the papers I want – does he know, this collector – does he know exactly what documents you're selling?'

'Not exactly. We advertised using your description of the papers – the one you so kindly wrote for us. So a couple are mentioned in detail, the rest are just as you described them: documents Richard Turnbull wrote at Bank House and letters to his friend Charles Heywood.'

‘Suppose I paid you – say a thousand – for a few that I want? They can’t be that valuable after all – an obscure travelling scholar …’

‘Ah, but they obviously are. To people like you. And him.’ Dot smiled placidly.

‘But you could still sell the rest at the original price and he’d be none the wiser. If he’s that keen, he’ll pay, and think he’s got a bargain. And you’d end up with seven thousand instead of six.’

‘Two. We’d want two thousand. And the money in cash, by Monday.’

‘Fifteen hundred. That’s still a big profit. And I want to stay until Monday evening.’

‘Done. I don’t know what you see in them, but one man’s meat, as they say. As long as you’re out of here by Tuesday.’

She must be mad. Four days to raise fifteen hundred pounds, and just five hundred in her savings account. She lay awake that night, angry and desperate; and when she slept, the dream came. She was falling, flailing; gripped and pushed, gasping endlessly for breath; tumbling in a black maelstrom over which an angry beast bellowed.

She has no name, the dead baby who inhabits these dreams; no face, no physical presence. She is merely a long-forgotten loss which erupts periodically from the obscure depths of memory.

Julia would have been glad, when she woke, heart pounding, to reach out and touch Miles, let his embrace infuse her aching body with warmth. But she had made of Miles, by an unexplained necessity, a fugitive and occasional lover. She slept again, and when she woke she knew what she would do. She rang her parents, arranged to see them that evening.

‘I’ve got some news,’ she said.

She had rehearsed her speech but still it sounded false. The words, ‘I’m getting engaged’ were as foreign to Julia’s vocabulary as marriage was to her life-plan. They were bound to know it was a lie. But they were overjoyed. It was what they wanted to hear; Julia was a better liar than she thought. Nora, with a look which simultaneously angered and accused, beamed at her with delight and relief.

‘The thing is, I need some money. We need some money. A deposit on a flat. If Aunt Tricia comes home …’

‘How much, love?’

'Two thousand?'

'Dad will go to the bank and draw it out tomorrow. Now, let's have some bubbly.' Nora ferreted in the sideboard, triumphantly brought out a bottle of Lambrusco, lit a cigarette and gabbled excitedly. Had they set a date? What about a ring? It would be a white wedding, wouldn't it? She must phone Auntie Poppy immediately. Julia sat on the sofa in a daze, sipping the warm, sweet liquid; a small penance, sickly and nauseating like the lie she had told.

'Tell us about him. When will we see him?' He could be anything they liked. In order to find the facts she so desperately wanted about Richard Turnbull, Julia had turned her own life into a fiction.

'I'm very busy at work right now. I'm going to Paris next month. I want to finish my PhD before we get married.'

On her way back to Bank House, she stopped at the local pub and bought a bottle of Merlot. She sat up till three in the morning, drinking and transcribing some of the papers she was not going to keep. A vigil, a farewell. Just three days left. She no longer ate with Dot and Ken, but bought bananas, nuts and dried fruit in the village shop. By working flat out – and smuggling some pages out to photocopy in the local library – she managed to transcribe what she thought were the most important of the documents.

On the Sunday evening she ran out of paper. It was seven o'clock; the shop would be long shut. Dot and Ken were out; she went into the kitchen, ransacked their printer. On the table she saw the printout of an email:

> Marchmont_1813@wanadoo.co.uk.
>
> Further to your email of 24th March, I should be pleased to view the documents in question on Wednesday, 3rd April at 6 p.m. Please apprise me of your full address, and confirm that if I purchase (in cash) I shall be able to take immediate possession of the documents.
>
> Yours,
>
> P. Marchmont

Julia paid Dot the next day and drove to Penrith, where she checked into a cheap bed and breakfast. Before making the journey back to New Cross, she needed to sleep, to reflect on what she had done. Lying to her parents was surely justified,

given that, had they known its true purpose, they would probably have refused to lend her the money. She'd pay it back one day. This was more important than a wedding. But her mother would be bitterly disappointed when the engagement was broken off. She wouldn't even get to see the ring, let alone meet the fiancé.

But that wasn't all. Amongst the papers which Julia spread out on the orange bedspread that evening was a notebook over which she had not negotiated with Dot. It had been on the table in her room at Bank House the night Dot came to tell her about selling the collection, covered by an Ordnance Survey map of the area on which Julia had been plotting Richard Turnbull's wanderings. She had left it there during the following days, said nothing about it. It was a deception of inaction and she had got away with it. Dot had driven a hard bargain, had no idea what she was selling; why should Julia not have the notebook too? It hadn't been a formal transaction; there was no paperwork, no receipt. Even if Dot realised the notebook was missing, even if the police came knocking, nothing could be proved.

Now she gazed at the worn, dirty cover, the mottled first page full of the unmistakable handwriting.

Richard Turnbull's journal, starting in the year 1811.

> When the streets run with Blood, the Mob shouts for the old ways again and who can blame it? Terror causes heads to fall, but seldom those which ought. To purge a Society of its undesirables – of all Ranks – could but serve that society. Were the streets to run with the blood of tyrant and oppressor, deceitful priest and vicious Landlord! But if the innocent go to the Guillotine while tyrants live on, then what use bloodshed?
>
> How welcoming the lights of an Inn glimpsed from the road; the anticipation of a roaring fire, the solitude of dining with only my book for company! Overhead, like a silent friend, the star Algol, the demon star, which like a woman is inconstant and changes visibly in brightness. Goodricke said that this fluctuation is caused by duplicity – that Algol is eclipsed by a companion which thus diminishes it; but who can tell?

Julia groaned as she flicked through the book. Most of the later material was written in Greek; page upon page of unintelligible writing which she had no hope of understanding. Her knowledge of that language began and ended with a few of the

letters of the alphabet picked up from school maths and physics. It served her right, perhaps. She closed the book, wrapped it carefully in a jumper and stowed it in her small suitcase.

9.

On the rare occasions that Peter Marchmont left London, it was in the service of his friend Henri de Saint-Gilles.

On this Tuesday evening he stood for a moment, as he did every evening, in front of his shelf of blue earthenware teapots, gazing at the polished convex surfaces which reflected an image of his café, and himself within it. Then he hurried upstairs to his living room, checked the train times on the Internet. He wrote a list of instructions for George, the young man who would look after the café in his absence; he would be away for the whole of the next afternoon and evening. In his study he removed from a locked drawer a thick envelope which he placed carefully in a black leather briefcase.

He went to bed early. Tomorrow would be a long day; the Penrith train would not reach Euston till one in the morning.

Peter had been twenty-four when he finally located the site of Henri de Saint-Gilles's arrest. It was a Monday afternoon in June 1979, a day when the rain poured down till the gutters overflowed, and he was still euphoric from the finalization of his divorce. The Veggie Burger was a run-down vegetarian café in a grey and dismal back street. Piled on the pavement outside were boxes of rubbish, from which protruded rotting leeks and carrots. Inside, Peter sat at one of the green formica tables, alongside students in long skirts and flared jeans, and ate a soggy cauliflower bake. The Veggie Burger had struggled on for many years, until Peter bought it in 1999. By then, Clapham had come up in the world; there was potential for an upmarket café in this now sunny and inviting place.

The building which Peter renamed the Blue Teapot had in the early nineteenth century been a thriving coffee house frequented by radical intellectuals and run by one Joseph Turner. Henri de Saint-Gilles and Richard Turnbull had been amongst its regulars. At least two of its customers had been arrested and tried for sedition on the

basis of words they had been overheard to utter on the premises; denounced by others on the lookout for French sympathisers or anti-monarchists. Peter was less certain of its later history. At some point it ceased to function as a coffee house and became a private dwelling, before being turned back into a café in the early sixties.

Peter had completely refitted the building, disclosing the original features hidden by its twentieth-century renovators. One of his happiest finds was in the café itself: he had broken through a flimsy plasterboard wall on which had been hung successive layers of wallpaper – purple-flowered, orange-swirled and, last of all, a phantasmagoric abstract in brown, yellow and pink – to reveal a section of original wood panelling which, on further investigation, extended round the room. He had hired builders and decorators, cajoled and threatened, paid good money for jobs well done, helped out himself where necessary. The café and his first-floor living quarters had been ready in three months. The top-floor study, however, he had fitted out himself, alone. Beneath the years' choking layers of dust and cobwebs, the old packing crates, broken furniture and abandoned possessions, he had seen its potential. Peter was good with his hands, a perfectionist; he had brought with him the tools salvaged from his marital home and, thankful now for the skills honed by those endless months of DIY, he set to work on his own account.

It had taken eighteen months of evening work to get the room shipshape. As he stood in white overalls and face mask over the slowly-vibrating floor-sander, he imagined he was peeling away the past; when he arrived at the original wood, which he varnished, re-sanded and varnished again, he realised he had reached a bedrock, a zero hour from which all further events were to be reckoned.

He trawled the antique shops for period furniture, bought upright chairs, a dark green leather Chesterfield – slightly scuffed but smooth and firm – a wing chair, bookcases, a sideboard. The huge mahogany desk which now stood in the centre of the room he had bid for at Sotheby's. He painstakingly arranged the many books and documents he already possessed which related to his quest. It was in this room, at last purged and furnished as it might have been in 1812, that Henri de Saint-Gilles now materialized. Peter had at first taken Saint-Gilles's apparition for an illusion, a function of his desire to know this man he so resembled; but he knew the ghost was real, an entity in himself. He'd appeared before, over a period of about ten years, starting on that terrible night in 1965.

But he couldn't be summoned; Peter had no control – even of supplication – over the night-time visits; had no recourse but to wait patiently for the dark chill nights of November, around the anniversary of Saint-Gilles's arrest.

The first visit had taken place one Saturday night three months after the work on the study had been completed. The Blue Teapot had been open for nearly two years and was starting to make a small profit; a fact of some moment for Peter, who had never been successful in anything before. Approaching fifty, he was perhaps too long in the tooth to have taken on such a risky venture, but it was one last chance to prove himself. Two fingers up to the masters who had written on his school reports, 'Marchmont is a lazy and devious boy who could well end up at Her Majesty's Pleasure,' 'A lame elephant could do better at cricket,' 'Peter would do well to take his nose out of his books and engage in social intercourse with the rest of the form.' Two fingers up to his father and mother, the wife for whom none of his efforts made the grade. He gave the café his all, not knowing if that would be enough, but knowing that anything less would be insufficient.

Working thirteen hours at a stretch, he was exhausted when he climbed the stairs at the end of the day. Most nights he went straight to bed. Sometimes he was so tired he did not undress, but lay down fully clothed, to wake the next morning with the alarm shrilling in his ears. But on Sundays the café did not open till eleven; on this November night he decided to spend an hour in his study before going to bed. In the stillness, above the street, far from the hum of traffic on the South Circular, he felt an anticipation, an electric disturbance of the air. He'd carried up a bottle of old Burgundy; it was while he had his glass to his lips that he became aware, through its distorting and magnifying surface, of the ghost sitting motionless, almost mocking, in the wing chair opposite the desk. Dizzy with pleasure, Peter whispered,

'You have come at last.' Putting the glass down on the desk, he added, 'I bid you welcome.'

Saint-Gilles bowed his head in acknowledgement.

'You see I've been expecting you,' continued Peter, indicating the room with an outstretched arm. 'I bought that chair for you. I knew you'd come.'

'You have my thanks.'

'You see I haven't been idle. Now I live in this place – frequented by you and that traitor Turnbull – now my physical home is my spiritual home also, I can begin.'

‘And you know, do you not,’ said Saint-Gilles, ‘what it is that you have to do.’ It was Peter’s turn to bow his head.

He was unsure how long he sat that night in the ghost’s presence. He merely became aware that, like the lingering glow of a sunset, it had imperceptibly faded. He sat up all night in a state of ecstasy. He had been blessed.

10.

The painting showed a chain-mailed knight who knelt with bowed head before an open-air altar; above him, a vastness of grey-white cloud. In the silence of the bookshop, with its polished wood shelves and floor, the books of brown and gold leather arranged in neat ranks, dust motes tumbling in a shaft of light from the window, Julia felt as if she had stepped from the busy Paris street into an enchanted garden.

‘He’s about to set out on crusade,’ said a voice behind her; a tall man of sixty-five or seventy, his suit well-cut, his hair the grey of Cumbrian slate. ‘I’m an atheist, myself; and the Crusades were ungodly to say the least; but I like the contrast: the smallness of the knight, the immensity of the sky. So it is for us all.’ He held out his hand. ‘Jean-Michel Fournier. Welcome.’

Her trip to Paris was the one thing Julia had not lied to her parents about. Over coffee one morning, in the Academy’s staff room full of threadbare arm chairs and scratched tables, Julia had bemoaned to one of her French colleagues the ever-widening remit of her research, and Richard Turnbull’s apparent connection with an elusive French émigré.

‘You should talk to Jean-Michel Fournier,’ said Yvette. ‘He’s an old friend of my father’s; he runs a sort of historical club, in Paris. He’s a real character, owns a bookshop on the rue Jacob, in St-Germain-des-Prés. You’ll love it. There’s bound to be someone he knows who can help you. I’ll give him a ring.’

So, to her team leader’s surprise – Julia seldom volunteered for anything – she had put her name forward for a secondment at the Academy’s Paris branch, to cover a month’s sick leave in April. The trip, expenses paid, would be an opportunity to visit Jean-Michel Fournier; if it turned out to be fruitless, she would have lost

nothing. Glad to have her life reduced for a while to a fifth-floor bedsit overlooking the Place de la Contrescarpe, and to live from the perspective of another language, she left London with enthusiasm.

She had made an appointment to meet M. Fournier at six on the first Thursday of her stay. Dodging the traffic in the Place de la Concorde, she wondered if Saint-Gilles had in fact fled the guillotine which once stood here, or if that story was an invention to mask a more sinister truth. How was she to unweave fact and fiction in this business?

'Yvette told me you had a problem of a historical nature,' said Jean-Michel. 'I was delighted to hear from her. Her father and I did our military service together.'

Julia explained briefly her need to find information about Henri de Saint-Gilles.

'My personal area of interest is the early Middle Ages. But there are two people – Yvette told you about my society?'

'She mentioned it.'

'There are two people connected to the society who may be able to help you. Carmen Broussard is one, but she's a semi-recluse and rarely attends. Sits at home writing poems no-one is permitted to read. I will give you her address; she might deign to correspond with you – though by letter only; I doubt she knows what a computer is, and she's always hated the telephone. The other person is my nephew Mathias. He lectures at the Institut d'Histoire de la Révolution française. If he can't help you, I'll be surprised. In fact, the society is meeting tomorrow night, he will be there. Please do come. Eight-thirty, at my apartment. No, of course you won't be intruding.' He wrote the two addresses on a sheet of paper.

The next evening, Julia walked from the Place de la Contrescarpe and found the building without difficulty. Jean-Michel lived on the third floor and was at the door to greet her.

'Meet the members of the Society of the Fifteenth of December,' he said. There were a dozen people in the long living room, none of them younger than forty-five. One of the walls was filled floor to ceiling with bookshelves. 'We're an informal group of amateur historians; we meet once a month to discuss the projects we're working on.'

‘And to put the world to rights,’ said a tall man whose tie could have been a crude test for astigmatism.

‘And so Jean-Michel can flog us the books he can’t get rid of.’ A white-haired man with the mischievous face of a ten-year-old.

‘Which keeps him in wine for at least a day or two.’ Véronique, the only woman of the group.

‘Wine which I liberally share with you.’ Jean-Michel.

‘In fact,’ said a man of about thirty-five, who had run up the stairs after Julia and joined the conversation as he rushed through the door, ‘it’s just an excuse for a lot of wine and hot air. Not to mention the dreaded onion tart.’

‘Sacrilege!’ shouted a man who was standing in a corner peering into a large book. ‘He dares to attack the noble symbol of our society.’

‘Don’t be too hard on him, please,’ said Jean-Michel, ‘or he might play his cello.’

‘You’re spared; I’ve left it at the university. I’m sorry to be late. The traffic was awful.’

‘Julia, may I present my nephew Mathias? Professional historian, authority on the Revolution, the Diogenes of our little group.’ Like his uncle, he was tall. He wore a long grey jacket of curious style; his hair was swept back into a careless pony tail.

‘Not that I have any objection to food or wine in general, you understand,’ he said as he shook Julia’s hand; ‘nor even to a little hot air. Onion tart, however, is another matter entirely.’

‘You do us an injustice,’ said Jean-Michel; ‘as well you know.’

They sat down to eat. The polished rectangular table had been neatly laid with silver cutlery, white plates, red damask napkins and glasses which sparkled under the light from an ornate chandelier.

‘What’s the significance of the fifteenth of December?’ asked Julia.

‘You’d never guess,’ said Mathias, pouring her a glass of wine, full-bodied and mellow.

‘I presumed it was a date in French history that I’d not come across.’

‘You could say that.’

‘Over thirty years ago,’ said Jean-Michel ponderously; ‘on Wednesday, 15th December 1976, my wife of seventeen years packed her bags and left me. An obscure date, perhaps, but one worth celebrating. We drink to liberation,’ he said, raising his glass. ‘I founded this society soon after. As well as having a passion for

history, its members have to be either separated or divorced. The only exception is Carmen Broussard, who's never married – though heaven knows she's been abandoned enough times – and Mathias, but he's not really a member; we just use him for his expertise.'

'And the onion tart?'

Laughter erupted round the table.

'My sainted ex-wife couldn't stand onions,' said Jean-Michel. 'For seventeen years they were forbidden me; even in restaurants, she used to turn her dainty little nose up. Said they made my breath stink. So I serve onion tart every month at society meetings: a declaration of freedom, a point of honour.'

Julia warmed to this eccentric group, felt herself accepted. Asked about her own research, she gave a summary of what she knew about Richard Turnbull's life, his possible involvement with Saint-Gilles.

'I feel that I simultaneously know the man intimately and don't know him at all.'

'Perhaps that's the only way we can know,' said Véronique.

'Your Turnbull sounds very like my son,' said a rotund little man with a neat square beard; 'full of ideas but never coming up with the goods.'

The next morning, waking late with a blazing headache, Julia vaguely recollected being handed into a taxi, the early morning streets whizzing past. She remembered she had a meeting with Mathias Fournier that morning at the Sorbonne. She breakfasted at a café in the square; the April morning was warm, golden yellow sunlight on faded shutters. Spring was gentle here, a caress with no obligations. As she brushed the croissant crumbs from her jeans, her memory jumped back five years. If only things could have turned out differently. But she couldn't have acted otherwise.

Mathias Fournier's office, when she at last found it, was neither large nor tidy. The bookcases were crammed, the books in no apparent order; the desk piled with papers, files, more books. She sat, student-like, in the chair opposite his desk; he cleared a space between them, moving a pile of books to one side.

'I must compliment you on your French.'

'My first degree was in French and history. I appreciate you giving up your Saturday morning to see me.'

‘It’s not a problem. I work at the weekend, anyway. I’ve got time on my hands. You said last night this character Saint-Gilles was executed as a spy?’

‘Yes. In 1813. Two years before the battle of Waterloo.’

A vague smile. ‘I do hope that’s not a loaded comment.’

‘God, no. But I almost feel with this French spy thing as if I’ve descended into a James Bond film – when all I was doing was researching an obscure radical scholar. I have to keep reminding myself that it’s not as far-fetched as is might seem. The war had dragged on for almost twenty years by then – the country was exhausted – all sorts of stuff was going on under the surface.’

‘What can you tell me about Saint-Gilles?’

‘At his trial, he claimed he was born into the minor aristocracy in Poitou, although he spent some time in Paris. He fled to England in 1793, lived there peacefully until 1812, when he was arrested on suspicion of running a spy ring. But the facts presented at the trial may not be true. I doubt if either the defence or the prosecution even tried to verify the claims he made about his background.’ She pulled a face. ‘I may be on a wild goose chase.’

‘Anything else?’

‘He used two names in England; first, de Lessac, then he reverted to his birth name Saint-Gilles. His defence claimed that de Lessac wasn’t a false name, but the name that went with an estate he’d inherited from an uncle. Apparently it was normal to take the name that went with the estate.’

‘That is correct. But …’ He ran his fingers through his hair, and smiled at her. ‘You may, indeed, Julia, be on a very wild goose chase. If both names were false, it will be almost impossible to trace him.’

‘I know.’

‘You believe that Saint-Gilles was convicted justly?’

‘I have no evidence to the contrary.’

‘What do your guts tell you?’

She frowned and said, ‘I don’t have much faith in intuition. Even my own. I favour hard evidence.’

‘But sometimes it’s intuition which leads us to the hard evidence.’ He took a notebook and a fountain pen from his jacket pocket, made a few notes.

‘Leave it with me. I’ll see what I can do.’

*

Ten days later, he rang her, said he had some information, if she would care to visit his office after work that day. She was late leaving the Academy; when she arrived, he was playing his cello. The plangent tones of a Bach sarabande filled the stairwell. Which suite was it? The D minor, perhaps. He played indifferently; the notes were all there, but there was a formlessness, a truculence in the way he crashed the bow down on the strings, which jolted her. As she leant against the wall, waiting for the end of the movement, catching her breath, she fell into a daze. Behind her closed eyelids she saw Richard Turnbull, striding the fields, riding from Clapham to London, playing his fiddle at country inns and in society drawing rooms. According to Montagu,

> Dick was much taken with the music of Beethoven, and not afraid to mangle the music to make it fit his own mood. That evening he took from his pocket a sheet of music, which he said Miss Fitzroy absolutely must play with him. Poor Miss Fitzroy! though she played Clementi with great skill, she was more than a little unnerved by this new Beethoven. She made a valiant effort, but was a poor second to Richard, who confidently coaxed from his old violin the most exquisite sounds. Afterwards he said, that Beethoven wrote against, as well as with, the spirit of his times, and that was the essence of all art. He spoke with intensity, and Miss Fitzroy's eyes were ablaze. I fancy she was half in love with Richard; and who would not have been when he played and spoke thus passionately?

As the last note faded, Julia knocked on the door.

'Your arrival is well timed.' She didn't disabuse him. 'My wife used to say I ought to give it up on humanitarian grounds, but it helps me think.'

'Does she still think that?'

'She's stopped saying it. Perhaps I'm improving. Now, look at this.' He put down his bow, leant the cello against a bookcase, and picked up a book. 'This is the *Almanach impérial* for 1808. As well as the usual calendrical information, the *Almanach* had a complete listing for the whole of the country of all civil and military posts, from the Emperor down, with other useful facts, such as on what days the post coaches left – or what to wear at the Imperial Court during a period of mourning.' He

opened the book at a page he had marked. ‘There is an Henri Saint-Gilles – note the lack of *particule* – listed here as a government official, a judge in a provincial court, in Poitiers. Normally only the surnames are listed; but one of the other judges was also called Saint-Gilles – a relation, perhaps – so the forenames are given. I’ve checked in the library archives and he held the same position in 1805, 1806 and 1807. But not after 1808. So, if it’s the same Saint-Gilles …’ – he handed her the book –

‘His story about living in England between 1793 and 1812 is at least partially untrue,’ said Julia.

‘Indeed. And he seems to have been working for Napoleon’s government.’

‘He did go into the law. Henri, that is.’

‘How on earth did you get into all this?’

‘I was seduced by a fragment of Richard Turnbull’s autobiography. It was written in a book given to me by an old lady.’

‘Ah,’ he said, leaning his chair back against the bookcase, his foot against the desk; ‘the irresistible lure of the historical text.’ She couldn’t tell if he was being sarcastic.

11.

The trial of Henri Jacques de Saint-Gilles, for High Treason
30th January 1813
II.

Sir Mortimer King was sworn, and examined by Mr. Field for the Crown.

Mr Field:	You are employed by Lord Sidmouth, one of the secretaries of state, are you not?
Sir Mortimer:	Yes.
Mr Field:	Did you employ Mr Nicholas Gurney to carry letters between Joseph Barclay and yourself?
Sir Mortimer:	I did.
Mr. Field:	And what did you do with the letters?
Sir Mortimer:	I opened them.

Mr. Field: Did you have them copied?

Sir Mortimer: I copied some myself. The others were copied by Mr Bellas. On a few occasions, there were more documents than we could quickly copy between us; I then called in Mr Ephraim Miller, a scribe, to help.

Mr. Field: What happened when the documents had been copied?

Sir Mortimer: I returned them to Mr Gurney, who delivered them to Joseph Barclay.

Mr. Field: Describe the content of the documents.

Sir Mortimer: They were documents recounting the state of the navy and the army in several places along the south coast of England.

Mr. Field: What did you conclude from the documents?

Sir Mortimer: That we were dealing with a spy.

Mr. Field: The letters were all written in the same hand-writing?

Sir Mortimer: Yes. It was presumed that he made a report of intelligence gathered from several sources.

Mr. Field: You presumed there were different sources?

Sir Mortimer: It was logical to assume so. There were papers relating to our defensive and offensive forces, gathered from different places. In one bundle, there was information given about the garrison at Dover, the naval yards at Portsmouth and Devonport; and a plan of the redoubt at Eastbourne. Once there was some information relating to French prisoners of war held captive in the north. It was unlikely that all this could be gathered by one man with such regularity.

Mr. Field: What was the regularity?

Sir Mortimer: From March of 1812, when Mr Barclay alerted us to the fact of the letters, there was a packet leaving for France about once every month.

Mr. Field: So you assumed there were several intelligencers?

Sir Mortimer: Yes.

Mr. Field: Did you take steps to apprehend the persons concerned?

Sir Mortimer: We succeeded in identifying LeConte and two others who worked for him: Roger Dubois and Charles Giroudet. But we understood there to be a ringleader, above LeConte. We therefore held back. We knew that if we were to apprehend his men, in all likelihood he would merely set up again with a different circle. I suggested we

employ an intelligencer of our own to root out this traitor. Mr Bellas had at that time a gentleman in his employ whom he held in great esteem, and who was highly regarded also by Lord Alexander. It was Lord Alexander's suggestion that we employ him in this capacity.

Mr. Field: And this gentleman's name was?

Sir Mortimer: Mr Richard Turnbull. Mr Turnbull lived at that time in Clapham, but came often to London and had Mr Bellas's confidence. He had moreover been used to a life of wandering. He therefore not only had exhaustive knowledge of all parts of the kingdom, but would not draw suspicion to himself in suddenly leaving London to travel the country. By all accounts he was a trustworthy man.

Mr. Field: And did Mr Turnbull accept the commission?

Sir Mortimer: He did.

Mr. Field: He was paid for the work?

Sir Mortimer: He was given expenses. He was promised a handsome payment upon successful completion of the affair. I am informed, however, that he refused finally to accept the payment.

Mr. Field: Do you know the reason?

Sir Mortimer: I do not.

Mr. Field: Are you aware of an incident which concerned Mr Turnbull and which took place on the night of May the 29th, 1812?

Sir Mortimer: I believe that on that night, Mr Turnbull was attacked by footpads in the vicinity of Drury Lane.

Mr. Field: Was this before or after Mr Turnbull was retained by the Secretary of State to track the alleged spy?

Sir Mortimer: It was about two weeks after. But it was not the first time.

Mr. Field: Mr Turnbull had been attacked previously?

Sir Mortimer: I believe he was attacked on the common at Clapham some time before this.

12.

‘Bloody hell, it’s cold up here! And that wind!’

‘Don’t be such a baby, Miles! It’s exhilarating. Come on!’ She took his gloved hand in hers and pulled on his arm, forcing him to make the last few yards of the ascent.

‘Tell me again why we’re doing this. We could have had a weekend in the sun.’

‘Richard Turnbull came here – possibly in pursuit of a French spy. French prisoners of war were brought up here to quarry the rock. That’s why it’s called the Roaches – it’s a corruption of *les rochers*.’

Richard Turnbull had travelled to the Roaches in the summer of 1812, not long after Napoleon’s invasion of Russia, while England was reeling from the combined effects of a protracted war, Luddite violence and the assassination of its Prime Minister. It was a

> desolate, rough, cold Place high in the Staffordshire countryside; where the wind howls around and through one & scarcely can be found any Shelter. The poor wretches are set to quarry the stone from dawn till dusk; I cannot but be sorry for them, – some mere Boys, cold and frightened; their uniforms in tatters. They looked upon me with suspicion when I addressed them in their native Tongue; but some, glad to hear it once more not botched and mocked, were happy to speak to me in their short meal break of water and old bread – asked me news, of the War, of their homeland. But I could get nothing out of them the first day. The next I returned with fresh bread and half a Derbyshire cheese (easily smuggled past their gaolers with the aid of a bank-note); which they fell upon though they declared it strange stuff.

Almost twenty years later, in April 1830, he had described a recent visit to the same area:

> I walked half a day before I found the rock upon which, in that terrible time, I had carved her Initials. – The awful suspicion beginning to present itself, I had wished some remembrance of Stability. The initials were but little eroded. How I wish I could say the same for myself! What is our life, William, that we start with such ideals and end up with a little paltry mound of disappointment and Chagrin?

The rocks, huge boulders eroded over time into grotesque shapes, were probably much the same as in Turnbull's day, though there was no sign of any carved initials. It was still desolate, if you discounted the hordes of walkers and climbers, and cold for the time of year; though today the sun shone, glinting on a small pool where they stopped to eat their sandwiches and drink coffee from a steel flask.

Over dinner in their hotel, Miles laughed and said,

'I'll be glad when you've finished this research, Julia. You're obsessed.'

She put down her knife and fork and looked him in the face. 'I could quite happily spend the rest of my life doing this.'

'What's so attractive about a loser who's been dead more than a hundred and fifty years?'

'He wasn't a loser.'

'Prove to me he wasn't.' He folded his arms across his white T-shirt.

'OK, so he didn't conform, didn't have a regular job, wandered about mixing with high and low, living hand-to-mouth sometimes. But his lifestyle – intentionally or not – commented on the society he lived in. By refusing to live what was considered to be a respectable life, he threw the social norms into relief.'

'Like the hippies in the sixties?'

'I suppose so.'

'Fair enough, but you're still obsessed.'

'If that's what you call being obsessed. I don't like being kept in the dark.'

'You make it sound like a conspiracy.'

'That's sometimes how it feels. I have to know. It's the way I am.'

'Have you got any plans at all? For your life? I don't see you as a modern-day Richard Turnbull. Fields don't come with ensuite bathrooms.'

'Very funny. I half-wish I had the guts for that. We're all so bloody conformist nowadays, aren't we? Of course I've got plans for my life. I'll apply for lecturing posts. Really, I'd like a life of uninterrupted scholarship, but that's a fantasy. In the current climate, even a lecturing post might be a fantasy.'

He put his hand on hers. 'I just don't want to be second fiddle to a dead dropout.'

'Play.'

'What?'

'The expression is *play second fiddle*. Not *be*.' She withdrew her hand.

'Play, then. I'm tired, I'm going to bed.'

Julia sat in the green chintz lounge and drank coffee. So she was obsessed; well, then, what was the problem? It wasn't a crime. She had to discover the facts, to lay bare the quiddity of Richard Turnbull's life. Just as, years ago, she'd been driven to discover a part of her own story which, but for her determination, might never have been brought to light. It was a relentless compulsion which she described with the French word *acharnement*; a furious, heedless tenacity which had about it something of the blood-lust of the hunting hound.

13.

It was only with the end of his marriage – a brief ordeal which brought experience and self-knowledge at the cost of heartache and large amounts of money – that Peter Marchmont began his serious research into Henri de Saint-Gilles.

Peter had entered the conjugal state mechanically and without question at the age of twenty-two, having presumed it was what everyone did. Standing at the altar with Stephanie, uncomfortable in morning suit and cravat (she had insisted on a church wedding: white tulle, top hats, flowers, bridesmaids, the whole caboodle) he had presumed that the ceremony, as well as removing him from his mother's reach, would spontaneously and as it were magically endow him with the normality he lacked. Stupid boy that he had been. So sure, yet so full of ignorance.

Falling in love with Stephanie had nothing of the heady emotional complexity which he had imagined in his school days to be the common experience of every young man, ugly and overweight or not. Even Mr Bates – Dusty Bates, the old Latin master, with his threadbare gown and bitten fingernails – must once have experienced this ideal passion; if not for Mrs. Bates, then at least for someone else, long ago, before his skin wrinkled and blotched and hair grew in his nostrils. Looking out during Friday afternoon Latin over the quadrangle, where crackling autumn leaves tumbled in the wind, Peter envisaged a love of tortured yet purifying intensity, such as filled the poems they read and parsed.

The reality had been a yoke not of help and comfort, but of inequality and torment. For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? Peter's love for Stephanie had been – he was the first to admit it – little more than a nosing out of a warm body in which to satisfy

a momentary instinct and achieve a brief oblivion. What he had thought to be love turned quickly to its opposite; it was his hatred, slowly simmering as the months went by, which was refined and complex. How many other men felt the same after a few years of marriage, Peter wondered, but refused to acknowledge it?

He had thought her beautiful, once. Her corpulence – the milk-white flesh which she rubbed daily with creams and potions, a backside which wobbled like milky jelly when he slapped it – was, at last, flesh of his flesh; grounding him in the here and now, it gave him cause to believe, if only for a moment in the arms of a woman in a refurbished two-up two-down in Hackney, in his own solidity.

She was, he came to realise, an ugly bitch. In the mornings she transformed her face, applied dark eyeliner and shadow to her eyes, crimson lipstick to her full mouth; thick mascara, heavy blusher over pale cream. It removed all softness from her face so that she took on the appearance of a painted Victorian doll he'd once seen in the V & A: monstrous and unappealing, staring out of porcelain rigidity. She teased him about his shyness; made fun of his stutter; a slight impediment, but one which increased under stress.

One night, as he spilled himself inside her, she whispered that she had to have a child, his child. It was only then that he told her he was empty, blank, a dead end. Sickened by the idea of sharing his ancient seed, and knowing that she would use it for her own purposes, to fashion out of it a homunculus after her own heart, he had secretly taken steps to prevent his replication in flesh and blood. She reacted with wailing and screaming, which he noted with little emotion except distaste; listened to her sobbing into her pillow that night and every subsequent night; until, in the end, she divorced him. He made no fuss, gave her a good settlement. They'd made some profit on the house, on which he had, to make her happy, lavished more money than he could afford. But he felt an immense relief, as if he had regained a freedom once lost, and moved back in with his mother.

It was then that Henri de Saint-Gilles came out of the shadows again. An alter ego whom he knew but could not see, voiceless and maligned, Saint-Gilles had lurked at the edge of Peter's consciousness since his childhood. Then in the late sixties, an uncle had paid a farewell visit to Peter and his mother before emigrating to South Africa. Uncle Bernard, older by nearly ten years than his wayward and absent brother, Peter's father, whose whereabouts were unknown and who was never mentioned, bestowed two gifts on the fourteen-year-old Peter: a ferocious groping in

the dark of the inner hall, while his mother was sewing upstairs in the drawing room; and a momentary glimpse of his own distant past.

'We're supposed to be descended from French aristocrats – on my mother's side,' said Uncle Bernard to Peter over tea on the last day of his visit. To Peter's delight, Mrs Seymour had made scones with raspberry jam, and a lemon cake, and chocolate truffles which sat large as billiard balls on the white doily. 'A lot of them came to London after the French Revolution, to escape the guillotine. My cousin Lydia started looking into it – dry old stick she was, nothing to keep her occupied in the dark winter nights. Then I got hooked on it myself, when I was invalided out of the army and had time to spare. There were two families, called Saint-Gilles and Marchemont. With an E. One of the Saint-Gilles branch was executed for spying early in the nineteenth century – got his head chopped off after all. Henry he was called. I don't know anything else about him. The Marchemonts seem to have been a pretty harmless bunch.'

'And now you're leaving the old world,' said Peter's mother, acerbically. 'I wonder why.'

'Off to pastures new,' he said. 'Sunshine and black bodies. Voices raised in song.'

Peter watched from the drawing-room window the next day as the slightly ridiculous figure in long shorts and a pith helmet carried his bags to the waiting taxi. After his departure, Peter's mother tutted and said, 'Invalided out of the army, indeed! Dishonourably discharged, no doubt about it, though it was all hushed up. Scrounged off us for months.' When Peter asked why he had been discharged, she merely replied, 'Never you mind. Dirty ungrateful so-and-so.' But Peter was thinking about the French exile. He had, in a flash of recognition, understood that this man was significant to him; that, though outwardly very different, their fates were essentially the same, encapsulated in loneliness, misunderstanding and calumny.

14.

‘Shit,’ said Julia. She was sitting on her tiny balcony, staring at the sycamore tree on the other side of the road.

‘Bad news?’ said Miles, handing her the plate of toast he had made. He sat down, put his arm round her.

‘I’m going to have to find somewhere else to live.’ She handed him the letter she had just opened.

> Dear Julia,
>
> I know this may come as a bit of a shock, but I’m moving back to England. I know I said I was going to settle here in Oz, but I've had a couple of upsets. I thought I’d found someone and it turned out he was married. I was bitten on my foot by a spider and kept coming up in blisters for weeks. And it’s so hot. Anyway, I've made plans and I'll be back before the beginning of October – there's some things I want to do while I'm here, and I've very kindly been given the use of a villa till the end of August, with a swimming pool. Then I'm flying to Sydney, and I’ll come home from there. Because the house in Edgbaston’s still let out, I'll need the flat, I'm afraid. That's why I'm writing now, to give you plenty of notice. I don’t really want to live in London but there’s nothing for it till I get myself sorted. Tricia

‘You can always move in with me,’ said Miles, kissing the top of her head; then, seeing the look on her face, he added, ‘If you’ve got nowhere else.’

She leant her head against his shoulder and closed her eyes. The raucous trilling of the phone cut into her reverie. She let out a long, controlled sigh and Miles answered it.

‘A man called Matteo or something. Sounds French.’

‘Julia, it’s Mathias Fournier. I hope I’m not disturbing you? I’ve got some good news. I’ve traced the Saint-Gilles family château. The countess says she’s got some papers, she’s not sure what exactly. She’s invited us down. What are you doing the last week in June?’

‘Could it be the week after that? The Academy’s shut then, for redecoration. I wouldn’t have to take leave.’

‘Sure, I don’t see why not. I’ll drive you down from Paris.’

‘I can get the train.’

‘No, it’s fine. Really. It’s quite remote. I know the area.’

‘Where is it? The château.’

‘In the Charente. You don’t sound very happy. I thought you’d be pleased.’

‘It’s nothing. I’m sorry; I’m very grateful.’

‘I’ll ring you back when I’ve spoken to the countess. Ciao.’

Julia decided to shelve the problem of Aunt Tricia’s return till after her visit to France. Following the trail was of the utmost importance; it was too easy to let the mundane business of life get in the way. She said nothing to Miles and he did not ask.

They arrived on Sunday evening, after a five-hour journey. Julia had taken the Eurostar from London that morning. Mathias’s car – a black Toyota of some sort – was low on the ground, subtly flamboyant, clichéd. Not that much of a Diogenes, then. Must be on a good salary. Julia exhausted the few questions she had about the château within the first hour of the journey, dozed uneasily in the soft leather seat. He seemed content to drive in silence, absorbed in his own thoughts. What did his wife think about his going away with a woman he hardly knew? Not that she had anything to fear. Julia sighed, looked out of the window at orange-roofed houses and tiny farming villages. It was to her work that she was faithful, and nothing would come between her and it.

‘Do you ever find,’ she said, breaking into his silence, ‘that you can’t give a project up?’

‘No.’

‘I sometimes think I could spend the whole of my life on this research. I could do what Richard Turnbull did with his *Treatise* and *Lexicon* – hang on continually for more information, fresh evidence. I’m almost afraid to write my thesis because it will limit what I can find out.’

‘But then you’d never do anything else. I’m usually infatuated with a project, at the beginning. By the time I’ve finished, I’m sick of the sight of it. You have to do the best you can with what you’ve got at the time, then move on. You can always revisit it later, if new evidence does come to light. Have you been to Angoulême?’ he asked, as they passed the turn-off.

‘I don’t know this part of France at all.’

‘If there’s time I’ll take you. It’s beautiful.’ He looked at her, his dark eyebrows creasing. ‘You haven’t told me much about Richard Turnbull.’

‘I’m not sure what to tell.’ She could have added, ‘And I’m not sure what your agenda is,’ but thought it would sound unnecessarily rude. She was in the difficult and uncomfortable position of having to trust him to lead her to information she desperately wanted. His readiness to help, his very friendliness, were suspect. Beneath the urbane exterior must lurk an ulterior motive of one form or another. Besides, what sort of lecturer drove a flashy sports car and had time on his hands? John Selby was easier to deal with; he was secretive, hostile and obviously not to be trusted, but their relationship was a symbiotic one in which each paid for what they got and consequently owed the other nothing. Did Fournier intend to poach her research? She was wary of sharing too much with him, for fear it might be engulfed, subsumed into his own.

The Château Ruffec was an eighteenth-century manor house some distance south of Poitiers. Madame la Comtesse, a sprightly octogenarian in blue jeans and a white grandad shirt, spoke no English. She welcomed them on the terrace.

‘You must be tired. I’ll show you your rooms, then you can rest before dinner. I've put you in the north-west wing; it’s cooler there. And please call me Ghislaine; Madame la Comtesse is too formal for a woman of my age.’

Julia opened the shutters of her bedroom and looked down at the terrace and an orchard, its trees in full flower. In a distant field, an old woman dressed in black was gathering mushrooms into a trug, methodically searching, her head bent. The room was furnished with eighteenth-century furniture and, thank God, had its own bathroom. Between it and Mathias’s room was a shared sitting-room, with a large table at which Julia sat and worked for the two hours before dinner.

There were two other guests at the meal: Marie-Odette, the countess’s daughter – a rotund and neurotic fifty-year-old – and her partner, known only by his surname, Polvier, both teachers in Limoges. Polvier, a man of overwhelming ugliness and shabby clothes, kissed Julia avidly, and she caught the mingled stench of stale Gauloises and cheap wine, felt his fingers curl round hers as she withdrew her hand.

Marie-France, the household’s one remaining servant, served radishes with butter, lamb cutlets in a Roquefort sauce with sautéed potatoes, a green salad, cheese and a

pear tart. Julia, who ate irregularly and had little interest in food, was surprised at how hungry she was.

'All the food comes from the local farms,' said the countess. 'We used to own them all, but we've had to sell them off, bit by bit. Everything except the château, and a few fields.'

'Quite right too,' said Polvier. 'Let the farmers own the farms. Makes sense.'

'Boh,' said Ghislaine; 'you and your text-book socialism. We were good landlords.'

'Have you lived here all your life?' asked Mathias.

'Since I married, in 1946. We'd planned to marry in 1940 but then the Germans came. Maurice couldn't join the army because of a heart tremor. So he joined the Maquis, kept it quiet – they weren't that fussy. I followed him. We made a pact; we would marry only once the Germans were defeated.' She chuckled. 'I nearly got myself killed once, laying mines on the bridge in the village. I bumped into a German patrol. Luckily I was fit in those days, and just ran like crazy before they had time to shoot me.'

'A lot of the Maquisards were good communists,' grumbled Polvier, and went outside for a smoke.

The next morning, the countess took them up to a large airy room on the first floor.

'My late husband's study,' she said, unlocking the drawers of a mahogany escritoire. 'There aren't many documents here; I gave a lot to the university when Maurice died; I'm not even sure I ever read them. I suppose I should have given these too, but I ran out of steam. Most of our books also went to the university; some of them were quite rare – so many books were destroyed in the Revolution. This estate was largely unaffected, though. Feel free to look at everything. I'll leave you; I don't know how many summer mornings I have left, and this one's too perfect to be wasted indoors.'

The drawers of the desk contained bundles of letters, neatly tied with blue ribbon. It took over an hour to sort through them, replace them in their envelopes and tie them up again. There was just one small bundle of three letters from the 1790s; the rest were dated between 1882 and 1929. Julia, who had slept badly the night before and was tired after the long day of travelling, felt dislocated in this new place. She would have coped better on her own. All this way for three letters. What could they

possibly reveal? She pulled the sleeves of her baggy jumper down over her hands, hugged herself as if she were cold.

'Hung over?' asked Mathias, looking up at her. He was running his hands over the escritoire, peering into the backs of the drawers. 'It was a particularly fine Bordeaux.'

'I only drank one glass. Or perhaps two. What are you doing, anyway? Looking for secret hidey-holes?'

'Well, it was worth a try,' he said, in response to her scornful look. 'It's not unusual in furniture of this period. Why don't you make a start on those letters?'

Half an hour later, sitting at the desk – at which Saint-Gilles himself might have sat – she looked out at the orchard, sun-dappled; saw Ghislaine sitting at a card table under a plum tree, typing on an old typewriter; the irregular clack of the keys punctuated the stillness of the summer morning through the open window. Julia saw herself as it were from outside, head on hand, unruly hair partially subdued, and thought, This is what I do best. Her work was a lens, which focussed and brought together the disparate elements of her being, but it was also a prism, splitting her into constituent parts, which fanned out like the rainbow; where to, she did not yet know.

She caught Mathias's eye.

'Do you only relax when you're working?' he asked.

'Or drinking.' Then, seriously, 'Yes. Miles says I'm obsessed but it's bigger than that.' Then, without explanation, she rushed out of the room and down to the orchard.

'Ghislaine, forgive me for disturbing you, but you said just now that the estate wasn't affected by the Revolution?'

'Yes?'

'It wasn't confiscated, then?'

'No, no; it's a small estate – by comparison – and a long way from Paris. Most likely they kept their heads down, let it all blow over.'

When she returned, Mathias had taken her place at the desk.

'What did you make of this letter?' he said.

'This estate wasn't confiscated in the Revolution. So that's another lie that Saint-Gilles told at his trial. I don't know about the letter; I wasn't sure what to make of it.' She took it from him and read it again, leaning against the desk:

8th November

My darling – My brother is here and forbids me any further contact with you. I pass each day in the forlorn hope that I will see you again. When we quarrelled, I thought you would soon forgive me, and everything would be as it had been. But the day I watched you ride away was the last – of our love, of my life. Anger took hold of me and my cruel words cannot now be unsaid. I have only the secret child within me which is of you. If he survives I would name him after you, but I know Henri will forbid it.

I fear for Henri, fear what he has become. He thinks I know nothing of his involvement in things he should have left alone. He was once a kind and honest man. He felt keenly the injustices and inequalities of this country, pestered our father to do more for the peasants, wanted him to provide education and a doctor – for the peasants! – as if they were no different from ourselves. Indeed he said, that had they been born into our circumstances, they would act and behave as we do. Father's reply was that if they were to take our place, then we should have to take theirs; for there must always be rich and poor – and how would Henri like that? But Henri was undeterred; and when news was brought us at Versailles of that awful day, he rushed, overjoyed, to Paris. Alas, he became then ruthless, self-absorbed, as if he had a secret which he needed to conceal. I wish he could have known you. You, perhaps, could have softened him.

9th November

When Henri returned, I thought he would have pity for my plight. I could not hold in what I had to tell him – ran down the stairs to the hall – as he strode through the door – I could not stop my tears, –

I thought never to have seen him thus – incensed, white – fists clenched – I will have vengeance upon him, he shouted, I swear it.

He has nonetheless been good to me; he will see that I am well taken care of, will provide for the child. But he frightens me. He is driven by something I cannot comprehend.

16th November

I am to be sent away, this day, to Henri’s house on the Ile d’Oléron. There I may bring forth my child in obscurity; this child who is now my life, my only reminder of him.

Henri tries each day to force me to reveal his identity, but I will not. Even if he is returned to his own country, Henri would be capable of seeking him out. He would stop at nothing.

All around me is black, hopeless. I have never lived anywhere but Paris and this château which is my home. Shall I ever return?

Dated this sixteenth day of November in the year 1794.
R. de Saint-Gilles.

'It raises more questions than it answers,' Julia said, handing the letter back. 'Is it relevant? Who wrote it? More importantly, to whom? Was it sent here or written here? It's interesting as a text; it starts as a letter, ends as a third-person account; the lover has receded from 'you' to 'he'; rather sad, I suppose. I'd say at a guess the writer – this R. de Saint-Gilles, whoever she was – lived here and never managed to post her letter. The brother could possibly be my Henri de Saint-Gilles?'

'*Your* Henri de Saint-Gilles,' he said with a raised eyebrow, 'he was indeed. Born in 1769, executed in England, as you have told me, in 1813. His sister, Rosine de Saint-Gilles, was one of only two of his siblings to survive childhood. Six died in infancy. Rosine was born in 1772, died in 1808. The child survived her. She had an older sister called Manon, born in 1767.'

'You're making all this up?'

'No.' He grinned. 'There's a family tree. At the front of a missal which I found in one of the desk drawers. Take a look.'

'OK,' she said, lifting her head from the untidy diagram and rubbing her eyes; 'Saint-Gilles's sister had an illegitimate baby in … 1794 or 1795. He was furious about it. She refused to name her lover – who wasn't French. Henri had got mixed up in something she didn't like. Where does that leave us? What do the other two letters say?'

'One is her deathbed letter – that's how we can be sure the other is written by Rosine. She signs this one with her full name – look – and the handwriting is the same. She says she forgives her sister for the wrong she has done her, begs her to take good care of the child – named Raoul – and asks for God's forgiveness. A few bequests. The other is a poem – not one I recognise – in the same handwriting.'

Julia glanced at the poem. 'Perhaps she wrote it herself. It's a banal enough little verse …'

'… of love which ends only with death. A skilfully-executed cipher underneath.' Drawn in ink were two letter Rs, one the mirror image of the other, the two tails intricately entwined. 'Rosine and her lover, perhaps? Or her son?'

'Or just a reflection of herself?' suggested Julia.

After lunch, while Ghislaine was taking her siesta and Mathias was seeing a friend at the university of Poitiers, Julia walked in the shade of the orchard. She found a low wicker chair which she placed under an apple tree near the pink brick wall, rested her feet on a stone bench and read over her notes:

> Richard Turnbull seems to have embraced duality as a way of life. In a society polarized by strong opinions for and against war and revolution, he had a foot in both camps. A Jacobin and an atheist (though to what extent these were significant factors in his life, as opposed to bluster and posturing, is perhaps open to debate), he frequented more than one revolutionary society in the provincial towns he visited. Yet, on moving to London, he found employment with a public servant, rubbed shoulders with the Church-and-King set, and was subsequently recruited by the government as a spycatcher. The burning question is: was he a double agent?

She felt a gentle tap on her shoulder. 'Hey, Julia, wake up. Good news.'

'I've not been asleep all this time?' She closed her notebook.

'I've arranged for us to go and see the Saint-Gilles archives tomorrow. We've got four days. Hélène says she'll bend the rules, because I'm an old friend; but her manager is back on Monday. She says she'll have to lock us in – because we've not got proper authorization. You don't have a problem with that, do you?'

Julia shook her head. 'I'd live in a dungeon if it meant I could get closer to the truth.'

He sprawled on the bench, his back against the tree.

'I'm not sure what I'm looking for here. What else can you tell me?'

She was silent for a while. 'I thought Turnbull was just an obscure wandering scholar – idiosyncratic, unorthodox, a freethinker, all the things I admire. He made himself up as he went along, was constantly crossing boundaries, wasn't afraid of ambiguity.' She looked up and saw he was stifling a yawn. 'Am I boring you?'

'Not at all. I beg your pardon; I don't always sleep at night.'

‘Anyway, I then find out he’s somehow mixed up in spying and I’m confused. A lot of Richard’s identity seems to ride on this affair with Saint-Gilles – but it’s come out of the blue for me. I have a contact – one of the few people who knows anything about Richard Turnbull – who is convinced that it was Richard who was the spy, and that he framed Saint-Gilles.’

‘On what evidence?’

‘Hasn’t produced any. That’s fishy to start with, but I’m keeping an open mind. That period of Turnbull’s life isn’t well documented. What I do know is that Richard was taken on by the government to flush out a spy who was sending secrets to the French. History names Saint-Gilles as that spy.’

‘Which hypothesis do you favour?’

‘Richard could easily have been recruited by the French. He spoke the language fluently, sympathised with the Revolution. And it wouldn’t have been difficult to frame Saint-Gilles. Popular opinion would have been against him from the start – a foreigner, an enemy. The jury were just ordinary men. But, given the lack of evidence, I don’t see much point muddying the waters with conspiracy theories. Lots of people supported the Revolution, especially in its early days, but that doesn’t mean they were spies. And there’s something else … I’m not sure about this man, this contact. I can’t put my finger on it, but there’s something about him I just don’t trust.’

‘So you do believe in intuition after all.’

She laughed. She had an urge to tell Mathias about Richard Turnbull’s notebook. She ignored it. He wouldn’t understand.

‘Do you read Greek?’ she asked.

‘Ancient Greek?’

‘Yes.

‘No. Why?’

‘I’ve got some material that Richard Turnbull wrote in Greek. I need a translator.’

He stretched out on the bench, closed his eyes. A few minutes later, he said, ‘Of course, we may never find the answers; the facts quite simply may not have survived.’

‘I’ll cross that bridge when I come to it.’

15.

While Julia was talking in the orchard with Mathias Fournier, Miles was sitting in the Blue Teapot with a ham and mozzarella panini and a bottle of mineral water, next to a plaque detailing the arrest and execution of a French émigré in 1812.

He had followed Julia to her last evening meeting, four months ago, convinced that she was up to something. Nineteenth-century research just couldn't be that compelling. He half – but only half – suspected another man; it wasn't her style to go behind his back. If there was someone else, she'd say so. Fiercely independent, in total control of her life, she sometimes seemed to enjoy shocking him. Though she'd shared her body with him, the rest of her might as well have been encased in armour. What she couldn't see was that she herself was controlled by this thing which left little room for him. It wasn't good for her.

He'd tailed her uneasily that February evening, keeping well back and mingling with the crowds to make sure she didn't see him. It was a dry evening; he followed her east along New Cross Road. She was a fast walker. Mechanically, Miles took a piece of paper held out to him by a Bible-basher, crunched it in his pocket without reading it. Julia seemed to be heading for Greenwich. She'd better not walk back; too dangerous by far for a woman on her own.

He saw her disappear through the doors of the Spanish Galleon. When he entered the pub, she was sitting at a small table by the window, opposite a flabby fifty-year-old. She had her back to him. Miles bought a pint of bitter and found a table well away, in a corner, where he could keep an eye on them. The pub was full and very noisy; with any luck he would remain undetected. He was taking a big chance. The consequences of being discovered didn't bear thinking about; she'd never forgive him for interfering in her private life.

They'd had one drink each: Julia an orange juice, the flab a pint of lager. They exchanged large-format envelopes. So, thought Miles with some relief, it wasn't an affair, then. She didn't stay long. Thank God; she hadn't seen him. Following the fat man would be a piece of cake.

For a moment, as he watched her walk through the door, her long grey coat open to the wind, Miles was tempted to run after her and take her in his arms, breathe in the soft, fresh smell of her hair. But how can you tell a woman who says that love is

an obsolete cliché, a sentimental shorthand for a complex raft of psychological and evolutionary instincts, that you love her?

Walking past the Blue Teapot ten minutes after the fat man had let himself in, Miles stopped to note the name above the door: Peter John Marchmont, licensed to sell intoxicating liquors to be consumed with food. The next day he ran a PNC check. The man was clean.

He'd said nothing of this to Julia. During the intervening months he had seen her become more preoccupied, more wrapped up in this thing which excluded him. She'd go anywhere, do anything, for Richard Turnbull. There was the trip to the Roaches, then the phone call from the Frenchman, which she hadn't explained; and Miles's suspicions had resurfaced. The day after Julia left for whatever château she was visiting in France – no wonder she never had any money – Miles returned to the Blue Teapot as a customer.

It was a grade-two listed building. Small inside, just six tables of varying sizes arranged round the L-shaped counter. The dark of the wood-panelled walls was relieved by the pine tables and gleaming stainless-steel cutlery. The food was poncey and over-priced, but it was good to eat, and the place had a lively atmosphere. No children. Marchmont, dressed in black trousers and a crisp white shirt under a black apron, served Miles with a quiet flourish, laying the plates and cutlery meticulously on the table. The first two fingers of his right hand were stained with something dark, black or blue, which he had attempted to scrub off. He was affable and polite, in the superficial way that publicans and restaurant owners usually are.

'You been here long?' asked Miles as he paid at the counter.

'A few years. I used to live in Primrose Hill. Bought this place when my mother died. Did you enjoy your food?'

'It was very good. I'll come again.' Miles pocketed his change and left.

Section 2:

Chimera

Chapters 16-88

These chapters form the part of the novel submitted for assessment for the PhD.

16.

It almost is a dungeon, thought Julia as she followed Hélène down shabby and labyrinthine corridors to the annexe which housed the Saint-Gilles papers. A trickle of natural light struggled through the high, narrow windows caked with dirt and barred by the grey steel stacks which reached almost to the ceiling. The floor was covered by an ancient oilcloth rubbed smooth by years of wear and torn in places.

Hélène, lecturer in eighteenth-century history and deputy-manager of the archive, was small and svelte. Impossible to tell her age; she could have been anywhere between thirty-five and fifty.

'The Saint-Gilles papers are over here,' she said, leading the way to the end of the room and manoeuvring one of the stacks on its runners. 'You can lift them down,' she said to Mathias. He took one. Julia took another.

'As far as I know,' said Hélène, 'nobody's ever done anything with this material; it hasn't even been sorted and catalogued. We just don't have enough staff. So many people donate their old family papers, thinking they're valuable objects of research, but much of it turns out to be of no importance. No doubt one day some student will come along and want to make use of it for her doctorate. The obscure and unimportant are increasingly valued these days. Until then, it sits here, waiting.'

They placed the boxes on a table.

'I'll come back for you at twelve-thirty,' said Hélène, touching Mathias lightly on the arm. 'Then we can go for some lunch. If you have an emergency, or if you need some fresh air, ring the bell by the door. Good luck.'

'There's a lot of stuff,' said Julia, when the precise clacking of Hélène's heels had faded into a heavy silence. 'But the boxes are labelled: look.'

'Not very helpfully: *Before 1850, After 1850, Miscellaneous*.'

'It's a start, though. We could leave the *After 1850* box and concentrate on the other two.'

It took the whole of the morning to sort the first box. The papers had been approximately stacked into fifty-year periods but were otherwise arranged randomly. Many were undated and the handwriting was difficult to read. The basement was hot and stuffy; four shadeless fluorescent tubes cast a sickly light over the tables. Julia felt her back prickling with sweat; by twelve-thirty, when they heard the door being unlocked, she had a headache coming on.

Hélène took them in her car to a chic little restaurant in the city centre, where she had booked a table in the garden at the back. Julia would have preferred the air-conditioned interior; she could feel the sun's heat blazing through the parasol.

Hélène ordered wine.

'Just water for me, thanks,' said Julia.

'And for me,' said Mathias.

'So you're picking up English habits? Shame on you.' She removed from her soft leather handbag a pair of Gucci spectacles, stared at the menu for a moment, then said, 'I'd recommend the *lapin à l'ancienne.* You won't find anything like it in the whole of Poitiers. And the foie gras of course, to start with.'

Julia was about to say that she didn't eat foie gras, when Hélène smiled at the waiter and ordered for the three of them.

'So, mon vieux, tell me what you've been doing with yourself all this time.'

'Oh, this and that. Research. Teaching. Less teaching these days. More research. A couple of doctoral students.'

'And Julia is one of them?'

'No,' said Julia, 'I'm doing a PhD in London. Mathias has very kindly helped with my research.'

'That is very kind of you. And is this the first time you've been back since …?'

'No, I've visited my parents a few times. Flying visits mainly; I'm so busy in Paris. Julia and I are very grateful to you for opening up the archives.'

'You should have got in touch. If you'd been here at Easter you could have come to the early music festival. You'd have enjoyed it. Jean-François was there; of course you remember him? Mercoledi.'

'Mercoledi was a boy at school,' Mathias explained to Julia. 'He wasn't good at anything. Then, the summer before his baccalaureate, his girlfriend's father taught him how to play the hurdy-gurdy. From that moment he'd found his place in life. And the strange thing was, he passed his bac. It was as if learning the instrument woke up the rest of him.'

Hélène continued, 'He has his own group now. He sings and plays other instruments as well. They give concerts in Occitan. Do you still play?'

'A little.'

'Early music still?'

‘Not much. Bach, of course; you can’t play the cello and not play Bach. But I’ve moved into more modern music. Schönberg, Stravinsky.’

‘Mon Dieu; what is Paris doing to you?’

Julia ate her foie gras in silence. Hélène spoke quickly yet precisely. She was immaculate. A saffron suit which encapsulated her body like a second skin. Her chestnut hair, expertly cropped, had been streaked with highlights of blonde; her makeup was perfect, applied with a mixture of scientific precision and cloudy artfulness, so that it enhanced her natural features. I wonder how long it takes to put that lot on in the morning. Julia finished the last mouthful of foie gras with relief, washed it down with several gulps of iced water and squirmed in her seat as a queasiness rose in her chest.

Later, back in the archive room, she started to feel sick. They had put two narrow trapezoidal tables back-to-back and sat opposite each other. Mathias seemed to have forgotten his earlier bonhomie and worked in silence, reading doggedly, scowling and making notes with his pencil. Julia, looking across the table, was struck by his resemblance to someone she thought she knew; his hair carelessly tied back, the high waistcoat buttoned even on such a warm day. She took some deep breaths and turned back to the letters she was reading.

In the car on the way back to the château he said, ‘Julia, I’m sorry about lunch time.’

‘It wasn’t your fault. But tomorrow I think I’ll go to that little student café on the corner for a sandwich. I actually hate foie gras. I’ve got a migraine and I think I’m going to be sick.’

‘It wasn’t just the foie gras I was apologizing for.’

She was sick when they got back to the Château Ruffec. She skipped dinner and went to bed, took painkillers and lay in her silent bedroom in semi-darkness, feeling her stomach heave. Always walking roughshod through someone else’s destiny. After a couple of hours, her body quietened and she slept in the cool white sheets, a gentle and now cool breeze wafting through the shutters.

It was not quite four in the morning when she woke, weak but refreshed. In the shared sitting room next door she opened the windows to let the cool early-morning air wash over her body, breathed in the fresh smell of dewy grass. Complete and utter stillness, except for the birdsong. She slumped in one of the armchairs with her

notebook on her knee, leant back and looked at the pale blue sky through the open windows.

‘Feeling better?’ It was Mathias Fournier behind her, dressed already and towelling his hair. He stood at the window and looked out.

‘It’s so quiet here,’ said Julia. ‘Such a contrast to New Cross.’

‘And Paris. I rather like it, though. For a while at least. It’s very restful.’

‘For a while. I always need to get back to London.’ She loved the constant movement of the city, the rush from one place to another; street upon street, layers of time, always something new to discover. Names on the buses like snippets of poetry. She even loved the dirt, sirens wailing night and day, sweaty journeys on the tube, jammed against complete strangers. It fortified her, reassured her that she was alive. The city left its mark on you. You loved it but it didn’t love you back; it was enchanting but monstrous.

17.

‘This is interesting.’ said Julia. She had made a pile of documents which could be dated between 1750 and 1800. ‘It seems to be the diary of Manon de Saint-Gilles.’

‘The sister?’

‘Yes; Henri and Rosine’s sister. A strange family.’

‘All families are strange. Don’t you think?’

‘Don’t go there. Just listen to this. The entries are a bit sporadic, but the sisters don’t seem to have been very close.’

> 19th June 1793. Returned from a supper at Madame de Troussy’s. Cross, grumpy, disgruntled. And sad. My body aches, though not from dancing. (The de Troussys are determined to carry on their lives as if the country had not been slashed down the middle by this bloody revolution – though they do it more quietly now than formerly.) I have brought a glass of wine and a brioche to my room; for I ate nothing all night. My mirror is covered in mourning crepe; I have no wish to see my reflection there. A cruel interlocutor, the glass; and, though it tells but half the truth, it is – alas – that half of the truth which is the more important in this still-corrupt nation.
>
> This the conversation I overheard between Ferdinand de Troussy, the son of our hostess, and his friend the Marquis des Deux-Montagnes in the dining room before

supper. Stupid oafs that they are, they thought that, since they were behind the screen and could see no-one, there was no one to hear their frippery. De Troussy spoke first – impossible not to know his simpering little voice.

– I would not dance with the elder Mlle de Saint-Gilles were she the last woman in France.

– Why ever not?

– You have seen her way of walking? Well, her dancing is even clumsier. Those feet of hers. A peasant's feet. Should have been a man, perhaps. But even then … Now the other one, the little Rosa …

– Rosine

– Rosine – now there's a girl to dance with. And more. Exquisite, n'est-ce pas?

Thus I am judged and found wanting. But, *quid pro quo*, I too judge and find wanting. Education has evidently been wasted on these two flowers of the nation's youth, since it has formed them to do only what the vilest peasant does: to judge one from the outside. Peasant's feet I may have, but it is they who have the peasant's mind. One between the two. If I had any say in the affairs of this nation, I would have the likes of Ferdinand de Troussy, pig-faced dullard, boorish idiot, on the tumbrels this very night. Would we were in Paris still! Papa says he fears for our lives, even at this distance; but he is an old man and lacks courage. There is nothing to fear at Ruffec but the dull atrophy of the mind.

11th February 1794. M. Hébert paid us a visit this afternoon. He evokes in me such a mixture of reactions; for, though he is hunched and crooked, his complexion grey and mealy, hair sparse, fingernails ragged and grimy – in short, repulsive – yet he is as unassuming as he is kind and intelligent. This is a fact of some note, any one of these qualities being rare enough amongst our neighbours; combined in the same person they are unheard of. Papa was unwell and kept to his room; Rosine, who not surprisingly dislikes M. Hébert, pretended to be sick also; thus I was left to greet him alone. We conversed, however, quite happily together upon his collection of butterflies and the work of M. Lavoisier, with whom he corresponds.[1] It is perhaps because Jacques Hébert knows himself to be devoid of looks, that he does not demand them in his friends. My lack of beauty, big feet, untidy hair, my awkwardness – that

[1]Lavoisier, born in 1743, had less than three months to live. Although he made seminal advances in the field of chemistry, he was also one of the despised tax collectors, or *fermiers généraux*; and for this reason was guillotined on 8 May 1794. JD.

whole catalogue of mortal sins which I have no power to correct – is, exceptionally, of no consequence to him.

3rd April 1794

How different we are, Rosine and I! She, content to linger in this country backwater, takes pleasure in the quiet, dull life we lead, minds not the constant pelting of the rain and the tedious round of social duties we are forced to perform. (To her these social duties are the very opposite of tedious; they are the fabric of her life.) Whereas I – I fling myself day by day, hour by hour, against the bars of this prison which will never be stormed, never demolished. Both bars and prison are invisible, an edifice of minute tyrannies built up over centuries and which I doubt that even a revolution can remove.

How far we are here even from Poitiers which, after Paris, is a mean little town (not twenty thousand inhabitants!). We might as well be living on the moon. How I miss the streets, the gossip, the theatre, the conversation. But more than that, I miss the feeling I had in Paris that I was part of something larger and more important than myself. Than all of us, perhaps. A momentous event began to move across our nation which I was privileged not merely to witness but to play a part in. A small part, admittedly – attendance at a few meetings hardly counts as participating in affairs of state – yet it exhilarated me to live during those years which led up to the revolution. Until then, my existence had been unreal, like a dream. Always I have had the feeling that I have strayed into someone else's life, that I am acting someone else's part. True, it became a dangerous time, and Paris a dangerous place, especially after the tyrant from Arras came to power; but I would rather run that risk than putrefy here, where the women are painted dolls and the men imbeciles who can think only of their dogs and their dinner, of protecting their income; men who demand of a wife only that she be docile and perpetuate his name. I would not marry one of those self-important nincompoops for a fortune.

4th April. – It follows, then, that unless I can in years to come persuade Papa to take us back to Paris – and that will never happen; for he is settled here, like my darling sister – I shall never marry. So be it. I shall immure myself in Papa's library and become a philosopher.

Since Henri's latest departure the house is quiet. He has been away so long. Except for those rare moments when M. Hébert comes out of his seclusion and walks the mile or so from his house to the château, I have no news of Paris. None of my former

acquaintances have returned my letters, from which I conclude, either that I am easily forgotten, or that events in the capital are too intense for such social niceties as letter-writing. Father, with whom I used to talk on many subjects, is increasingly reclusive, shuts himself in his study for hours and days on end, has Catherine carry his meals to him there.

I close my eyes against the guttering of my candles. Out of the darkness I see our house in Paris. Monsieur de Vaubon, pleading with Henri; his voice low, his mouth close to Henri's ear, so that I could not hear the words. His hand white and tense as it gripped Henri's shoulder. Near the fireplace hovers the high-and-mighty American whom Henri had lately taken up.

My brother spends his time in Paris now; he returned only for our mother's funeral and then was off again. I begged him to allow me to go back with him, but he said I was needed here, to look after Papa; that Paris was no place for a woman. Which hollow excuse was merely a way of saying that I was not welcome by his side and that he is not prepared to share his business with me. He refused to tell me what was going on that night when I came across him and Vaubon and the American. – He thinks I am stupid, tells me I am imagining things. But I will find out. Whatever it is that he does not want me to know, I will uncover. I always do.

5th April

What malign omnipotence has decreed that I should spend my days entombed here?[2] This afternoon Madame de Fontenoy called upon us, and I was forced to endure the inanities of her conversation for nigh on two hours. Endlessly did she talk on, till I thought my head would burst and that madness was overtaking me. A wild desire assailed me to scream at the top of my voice, as I used to do as a child, running with Henri and Rosine round the orchard in the windy days of autumn, shaking pears and apples from the trees.

And what was it that almost caused me to forsake the social decorum which is my second nature? These were the topics of her endlessly monotonous conversation:

What Monsieur Destouches said to her on Thursday at dinner. What she said back.

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[2] 'What malign omnipotence'; Manon uses the phrase 'quel dieu vengeur', which is to be found in an obscure prophetic book of the Old Testament (Nahum 1. 2). She no doubt had exposure to the Scriptures as part of her upbringing. (Pre-Revolutionary advice manuals for girls stressed the importance of reading the Bible – and little else.) Interestingly, this short book contains an expression of divine wrath and disapproval which resonates with Manon's mental state: her anger and her sense of condemnation by the divinity. JD.

How she met Mlle de la Tour the other day in front of the cathedral at Angoulême. What she said to Mlle de la Tour and what Mlle de la Tour replied to her. (None of it worth expending ink or paper on).

Sophie Rostand's new hat. My God! Unimaginable nonsense. Rosine, of course, was in her element; while I, shrieking silently behind my polite smile, shook apples from a tree somewhere, long ago, in my head.

I pray night and day to be released from this hell.

It is dawning on me, however, that cunning and intelligence may be more efficacious than prayer. (It would seem that the ears of the Supreme Being are no less deaf than those of the old God.)[3] If I reach the age of thirty without a door having opened to me out of this dreary life, I shall simply run away. On my thirtieth birthday I shall come into the small annuity left to me by Maman. And Henri will support me. I have suspected for some time that he is not merely tending the family's interests in Paris, that his secrecy points to an activity both clandestine and irregular. To discover the nature of this activity would greatly enhance his willingness to acquiesce in my plans.

2nd May

I love this fluid hour, when one day turns into the next. As when a girl becomes a woman; imperceptibly a boundary is crossed and there is no going back – yesterday cannot be retrieved any more than a girlhood, and one must endure the pains of today in the knowledge that it is today alone which exists. How I hope a new day might dawn for me – that this black night of oppression will come to an end.

A visitor arrived this evening, and the interminable lethargy of this place is temporarily broken. We heard hooves on the gravel. Papa had as usual retired to his room where he sits and dreams of Maman and of the past, and Rosine and I were sitting quietly in our private sitting room, she occupied with a piece of embroidery, I trying to compose a poem. But my lines came out as often as not too short, and I became impatient, and started to scribble upon the paper. (Our tutor, M. Lefèvre, was always puzzled by my poetic style. 'It is terse and abrupt,' he would say, tapping his finger upon the lines as if

[3] The Revolution officially dechristianized France. Some of its early proponents suggested a 'cult of Reason' to replace Christianity; Robespierre disliked this atheist emphasis and later responded with a 'cult of the Supreme Being', officially presented to the National Convention on 7 May 1794.

to marshal them into proper shape; 'and not at all befitting a lady.')[4] Outside the wind had got up and was howling round the chimneys – more like November than May – and the heavens had opened – a benediction. Horse and rider stopped at the front steps and a great knocking followed. When I heard André plodding up the stairs on his way to Papa's study, I threw open the door to ask him who it was, though I had little doubt but that it was one more of Henri's associates, a stream of boring and officious men whom he sends from Paris at regular intervals on God knows what business.

— Some whipper-snapper, says he has business with Monsieur, said André, curling his arrogant lip and grumbling under his breath about visitors who rode up at such unsociable hours. I reminded him that it was but nine in the evening. Father has been lax with the servants of late and they begin to get above themselves; a less-than-desirable effect of the recent upheavals this country has known.

I passed a hand over my dress and ran down the stairs which led to the main hall, slowing when I came within sight of the stranger. A young man it was who stood there, hat in hand, in a pool of rainwater. His hair cut short. Though tall he was pitifully thin and appeared small and forlorn, alone in the vast hall in his sodden cloak, which seemed to dwarf him.

— Monsieur, what business have you here with us? I asked.

He bowed elaborately.

— I ask pardon for this disturbance, Madame, he said. I carry a message for Monsieur de Saint-Gilles, but I beg also lodging for the night, being many miles from home.

— I presume by Monsieur de Saint-Gilles you mean my father and not my brother? My brother is from home.

He said it was indeed father whom he wished to see. He spoke with a slight accent which I could not place. His name was Akermann, he said, and I surmised he must be an Alsatian.

— Then, M. Akermann, you must rid yourself of that cloak. I rang the bell to summon Joseph to take the gentleman's coat and hat and told him to despatch Emmanuel to stable the poor horse. While these orders were being obeyed, André returned, his face still as sour as stale vinegar, and said, Monsieur will be pleased to receive you.

— I will take you to Papa, I said, and preceded him up the stairs. Papa rose with a sad smile and shook the stranger's hand with warmth; I was then obliged to leave them. I had Elisabeth prepare the blue guest room and bring a cold meal to the sitting room, where our visitor gratefully sat before the fire after his interview with Papa. I introduced him to

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[4] Manon would have been expected to use the alexandrine, the twelve-syllable line which is the standard form in French poetry. JD.

Rosine, who made eyes at me behind his back; and for once we were in agreement. We passed two pleasant hours together, Rosine and I quizzing our guest about his travels, where he had been and why he was so far from home. We should have stayed up longer, but – having polished off every scrap of food on his tray, as if he had not eaten for days – our visitor begged to be excused. He had ridden through the day, he said, and was exhausted.

But as I read over what I have written, it stares up at me so stale and flat, it fails entirely to encapsulate my experience of this evening. How can I convey the excitement, the joy brought by M. Akermann? A sea change in the dull routine of our household. Yet write it down I must; for otherwise the experience seems but half-lived.

The rain, which stopped soon after our gentleman's arrival, has come on again, harbinger perhaps of a fertile summer. But as every farmer knows, a harvest can be ruined by too much rain as by too little.

5th May 1794.

Our house guest brightens the day with his conversation and his laugh. He is indeed from Alsace, from near Strasbourg – but a man of such learning that I could listen to him half the day.

— We are so remote from everything here, I said to him at dinner.

— Yet your château is beautiful, he said, with a smile – what a smile he has! His eyes – a dark blue-grey – light up and the skin around them creases. Like the sun coming out after a rain shower, a rainbow in a limpid sky.

— You say that because you come to it as a traveller. Your view of it would be entirely different were it the circumference of your world.

He walks in the garden with Rosine and me, and we talk of many things. He speaks numerous languages, and teaches us words of Greek, Latin, English and German. He admires Rousseau and the *Encyclopédie*. At times he is full of humour and teases us when we mispronounce foreign words. At others he can be very serious; when he is deep in thought he frowns horribly, his black eyebrows creasing. It is as if a shadow crosses him then. He teaches us so much – shows us insects hiding under leaves and stones – at which Rosine shrieks and pretends to run away – reads to us from the books in the library when it rains. He wrote us verses last week; my sheet, upon which are written four stanzas of perfect alexandrines, is locked away in my drawer of treasures, where I keep the rosebud given to me by Monsieur H.

6th May – I talked for over an hour with M. Akermann in the library this morning. I had confirmed with Elisabeth the plans for tomorrow's dinner, at which Papa's learned friends will be present (it will be simple enough, given the shortages we suffer from); after which I took refuge for an hour amongst the books, sitting in the window seat with a volume of poetry, gazing now and again at the alley where the branches of the linden trees waved in the wind – silent giants punished by being rooted to the ground. I had begun to leave behind my daily existence and approach that state of mind in which I am no longer a woman of 1794, rooted to this one place on earth, but a being free like the wind to drift and roam.

Monsieur l'Alsacien – this is what we call him, Rosine and I – apologised for disturbing me – but it was not a disturbance and I said so. He said he would have walked in the park but for the weather – it had rained all morning, and the paths were full of mud. He says the countryside and the climate here are not dissimilar from those of his native land – a predominance of rain, even during the summer. We talked for above an hour; then the bell rang for dinner, and he gave me his hand to help me up from the low seat (when I am alone, in the library or in my room, I sit as I have been told a thousand times I should not, with my legs beneath me). Over the meal I felt the table come alive under the power of his words. He is a kind conversationalist; unlike Papa's friends he is happy for me to speak as well as listen. Rosine draws our guest's attention by questions such as: Do you not think, Monsieur, that the *chemise de la reine* is most becoming? – She had merely gawped when M. l'Alsacien gave us a talk on the origins of religion – we must read the works of M. de Volney, he said. I dare say she likes him well enough – he has good looks, of a singular sort, as well as wit.

Around six the rain stopped. The sun appeared, casting oblique shafts of light on the park. We walked in the garden, Rosine and I on either side of M. l'Alsacien, a guard of honour. The air was fresh, the earth washed clean, Eden in Poitou. From the ground arose that smell of wet earth which occurs after rain; it was a delight to walk thus, and hear our visitor's tales of the cities he has visited – he was in London before the war, and has recently been in Paris. How I long, I said, to live in the city, where one is in touch with the latest events, with affairs of state and of culture, in short with life. He said that Paris was lately more an arena of death than of life, and that no person of sense would wish to remain there.[5] And I, said Rosine, should be quite content to live out my days here, in this quiet village far from the centres of power, if

[5] The Terror, during which thousands of people accused of disloyalty to the Jacobin regime were indiscriminately imprisoned and executed, had begun on 5 September the previous year (and would continue until 27 July 1794). JD.

only I had someone to share them. I miss our brother so. You would like our dear Henri, she added. And he would like you. And we could live here, the four of us, for ever, and walk in the garden, and nothing need change.

He laughed at this; a little bitterly, it seemed. All must change, he said. Always. He asked us about Henri, what he was like and if he ever talked of his life in Paris.

'Oh hell,' said Julia.

'What's the matter?'

'That's the end of the notebook. It comes to an end mid-story.'

'Perhaps there's another. She no doubt continued it.'

'If she did it's not here. This was the only notebook in this box. Everything else is on sheets of paper, and it's not written by Manon.' She riffled the documents spread out on the table. 'Nothing. These are all letters; I'll look at them later. But no diary. Did you find anything in the papers you looked at?'

'The mother was a de Lessac,' said Mathias. You told me that was the name Henri de Saint-Gilles used in England.'

'When he first went there. He said he'd inherited an estate from his uncle.'

'One of his mother's brothers, presumably.'

'Do you think M. Akermann could be the mystery lover?' said Julia.

'Not unless he's masquerading under a false identity. Rosine's lover was a foreigner.'

'What's your opinion of Manon?'

'Either uninformed or not quite in touch with reality. She's desperate to get back to Paris – in 1794 – when everyone in their right mind is trying to get out.'

'But there was persecution all over, wasn't there?'

'There was. Lyon had a terrible time of it. But it was patchy; some areas weren't much affected at all.'

'Henri obviously wasn't in England in the spring of 1794. And Manon thinks he's up to no good.'

'That's possibly just a fantasy, a way of spicing up her life.'

'But Rosine's letter – the one we read on Monday, at the château – says he'd got mixed up in something nasty; don't you remember?'

'True. These letters here, written to his sisters and his father, are very circumspect; he doesn't say much at all. Ostensibly he was acting for his father,

trying to protect the family's business interests in Paris, just like Manon says. But business can be a cover for all sorts of roguery.'

'It often is all sorts of roguery.'

'That's very cynical, Julia.'

'I am very cynical. After lunch, I'm going to look through the other two boxes. You never know, there might be papers from our period in there. The filing isn't very accurate. I might even find the rest of Manon's diary. In fact, I might skip lunch and get on straight away. After yesterday I'm probably better not eating.'

'No – please come. We can all go to the brasserie for a sandwich.'

18.

The trial of Henri Jacques de Saint-Gilles, for High Treason
30th January 1813
III.

Mr Charles Faden was sworn and examined by Mr Jessop for the Crown.

Mr Jessop:	You attended the house at number 7, Litchfield-street, did you not?
Faden:	I did.
Mr Jessop:	On what date?
Faden:	On the 29th of November last, at about four in the afternoon.
Mr Jessop:	And what were your directions?
Faden:	We were to apprehend any that might be within the house. We had also a warrant from Lord Alexander with instructions to search the house.
Mr Jessop:	You were how many?
Faden:	Three – myself and two others.
Mr Jessop:	Describe what you found upon your arrival.
Faden:	The house was tight shut. We banged upon the door for several minutes before it was opened by one of the occupants.
Mr Jessop:	Do you know which one?
Faden:	The one named Giroudet. The minute he saw us, he tried to slam the door in our faces, but we were too quick for him and pushed him into

the passage-way. There was another waiting for us and they set upon us like dogs when we attempted to apprehend them. They winded one of my fellow-officers and made as if to escape by the back of the house. We caught one of them – the same Giroudet; I all but brained him with my staff – and tied him hand and foot. But the other got away – Duboys was his name, as I recall. As far as I know, he is still at large.

Mr Jessop: And was there anyone else to be found in the house?

Faden: We found a third man skulking upstairs. He came quietly once we found him – well, not quietly exactly – he was prattling nineteen to the dozen, half in English and half in French, not that we listened to either. – But without a struggle.

Mr Jessop: This man was?

Faden: His name was LeConte. A Monsieur Frog, like the other two.

Mr Jessop: And what was he doing when you found him?

Faden: He had locked himself in a small room upstairs. When we forced the door, he was attempting to empty the contents of his pockets into a box on the desk.

Mr Jessop: He did not attempt to escape?

Faden: He could not; there was but one exit from the room, and Bill and I were in the doorway. It was two to one, and he was not a fighting man.

Mr Jessop: And what did you do with him?

Faden: We bound him and left him with the other.

Mr Jessop: And the documents?

Faden: We emptied his pockets of those he still had on him. In his haste, he had dropped several upon the stairs, which we also gathered up. We examined the desk and collected the papers stored there.

Mr Jessop: There were many?

Faden: A few were scattered on the floor and a substantial number in the box.

Mr Jessop: Too many to have been all in LeConte's pockets?

Faden: Undoubtedly.

Mr Jessop: Did you read any of them?

Faden: We glanced at the contents. Most of them were written in what we presumed was French – neither of us speaks or reads any language but our own.

Mr Jessop: What did you make of them?

Faden: They were not ordinary letters. They were lists of ships and places and names. One I think contained the word ‘insurrection’.

Mr Jessop: And what did you think of that?

Faden: I was unsure. It stood out because it was an English word, but the rest was unintelligible.

Mr Jessop: And did you find anything else?

Faden: We found a seal in the desk and a small chest of money underneath. Pens and ink, a bottle of port wine, a few candles.

Mr Jessop: How much money was in the chest?

Faden: On a quick look, perhaps as much as a hundred guineas in English money. But there was also some French coin.

Mr Jessop: And what did you find in the rest of the house?

Faden: To our surprise we found a gentleman in the parlour.

Mr Jessop: Why to your surprise?

Faden: He had made no attempt to get away. He was sitting in an armchair in his cloak, and did not seem in the least surprised to see us.

Mr Jessop: Who was this gentleman?

Faden: He was an American. His name was Mr John Price.

Mr Jessop: And how did you proceed?

Faden: We apprehended him, as we had been instructed.

Mr Jessop: You had been instructed to apprehend this Mr Price?

Faden: Not specifically. But we had been told to apprehend everyone we found in the house.

Mr Jessop: And what was his reaction to this?

Faden: He came quietly. Though he was not happy when we searched his person.

Mr Jessop: What did you find about his person?

Faden: Some papers, which we took. A little money.

Mr Jessop: How many papers were there?

Faden: Six, that is all.

Mr Jessop: Can you say what they were?

Faden: Five of them were letters. There was also a blank passport.

Mr Jessop: What sort of passport?

Faden: A French one; I noticed the words ‘République Française’ at its foot.

Mr Jessop: Can you describe the rest of the house?

Faden: It was very run-down; filthy and rat-infested.

Mr Jessop: Was it apparent, how many lived there?

Faden: One of the chambers on the upper storey, below the attic, showed signs of occupation. There were two small beds, which had been slept in, and on a small table the remains of a meal and several empty wine bottles. There had recently been a fire in the grate. Some clothes were hung on the chairs.

Mr Jessop: Clothes which were later found to belong to Dubois and Giroudet, is that correct?

Faden: It is. But for the rest of the house, there was no sign of anyone living there. There was a bed made up in one of the other rooms, but it bore no signs of having been lately occupied.

Mr Jessop: And from that you inferred what?

Faden: That the two, Duboys and Giroudet, lived at the house, but that the others who had business there merely came and went, possibly staying a night or two.

Mr Jessop: Could you look at this seal and say if you recognise it?

Faden: Yes, it is the one we found at Litchfield-street.

Mr Jessop: You are certain of that?

Faden: Yes. It is a design of two leaves enclosed in a circle.

Mr Jessop: Thank you, Mr Faden, that is all.

19.

When they had been locked in once more, Julia said, ‘She makes me feel like a naughty child.’

‘Bof!’ was his only reply. He was ferreting in his briefcase. Julia looked through the box labelled *After 1850*. She carried it to a metal bench on the other side of the room, laid out the bundles of paper on it, sneezed at the dust she had stirred up. Some of it, laid down over centuries, might be particles of nineteenth-century dust floating up to her twenty-first-century nostrils. She thought of the flint axe-heads in the museum in Carlisle which she had first seen at the age of ten. Boring little bits of stone, she’d thought at first; but on being told by her teacher that they dated from around 4000 BC, she had felt dizzy and for a split second lost all sense of the world around her. Such a long time ago.

She jumped at his hand on her shoulder.

‘Sorry, I was miles away.’

‘You were right. I’ve found it – this notebook is dated 1794; it was bundled up with a pile of papers. A diary. Possibly the same handwriting; what do you think?’

‘Let me see.’ He passed it to her. She flicked through the pages. ‘Probably the same handwriting. And it starts on the tenth of May; the other one ended on the fifth. It must be the next bit of her diary.’

‘Can I read over your shoulder?’

‘No. It’ll put me off.’

‘Read it out loud, then. I want to know what it says.’

‘You read it. You’ll be able to manage this handwriting much better than I can. I’ll make notes.’

So they sat opposite each other at the trapezoidal tables and Julia listened; in the quiet of the afternoon, she was reminded of being read stories as a child, and felt the same sense of tranquillity and anticipation.

10th May 1794

We walked together this afternoon. After dinner, past the end of the avenue, down to the fields which border M. de Troussy’s land.

He touched me lightly on the arm.

A red-hot flame, a fork of lightning which brightens and splits a dark sky. Standing by the hedge looking over the fields, the de Troussys’ lake under a grey-white sky the colour of the powder we put on our faces. He wanted to draw my attention to a triangle of geese, a black formation which flew from one end of the sky to the other, their dissonant call screeched into the silence.

A red-hot flame. Kindness and intensity in his look. Something indefinable yet penetrating in his grey-blue eyes. Flame and lightning and that steel-grey look I carried with me through the afternoon and evening, fed on them, a sacred food.

At that moment my destiny split down the middle. A line scored across a page to mark before and after. The gods shifted a little in their seats and a drop of ambrosia fell to a starving woman.

11th May 1794. A world opens up before me. A rent in the fabric of my life, fustian turned to silk. – Yet it is at the same time a chasm at my feet. Dizzy and vertiginous, I look down at the blackness into which I must fall. A force I cannot resist.

13th May. When we went in to dress for dinner, he kissed my hand. I was nonplussed and did not know how to respond. Of course, men have kissed my hand before, as often as not in mocking condescension, and I am well drilled in the social forms. This, though, was different. But there is something in me which prevents or stifles a response. A general paralysis of body and of tongue. – I could not even bring myself to raise my head to look at him; though walking to my room I felt as I did when, as a child of seven, I ran across the north field at sunrise on a May morning and felt the world new-born, cold dew under my feet and rosy light encircling my body.

We talked long this evening, Raoul and I, sitting on the wooden bench beneath the apple trees in the orchard. The bench Papa had Jean-François make for Maman before she became too ill to take the air in the garden.

14th May

This afternoon, Rosine went with Mlle de Sacy to the milliner's in Poitiers, pleased to be seen by M. Raoul in her new gown; and I thankful to be left alone with him, strolling in the garden. We walked down the avenue, under the canopy of lime trees, their leaves dripping a little from the morning's shower. The air warm, a hint of freshness, a breeze which ruffled the strands of hair on his neck. He walked in silence for a while – he is given to pensive silences – striding with his hands behind his back, eyes on the ground. Then he asked me, Mlle. Manon, do you ever wonder how this revolution will turn out?

— I have less knowledge of it than you, I replied. Papa removed us from Paris almost as soon as it started; he said nothing good could come of it, especially for the aristocratic families. Even here, he is fearful that we shall be set upon and our château razed to the ground. I could wish to have played a greater part in it, but I should be surprised if it ends without disaster.

— You believe there is no right in it?

— Righteous principles, maybe, in part. I for one should be content with a fraction of this wealth; I would gladly live in a house no larger than is necessary, with just one or two servants, if it brought me independence. Great wealth is as constricting as great poverty. But I would not give up willingly what the mob attempted to wrest from me by force!

— But the mob are thus because they have hungry bellies and are driven to it by centuries of oppression.

— But we have always treated our peasants kindly. It is surely unjust to destroy all alike, when we have not all behaved alike. Besides, it is not only the mob who act

abominably now. What will come of it? Can justice and equality, can liberty and security ever proceed from butchery? The Jacobins are no better than the tyrants they replaced, and many families are worse off and prevented from helping the poor.

— It is perhaps not help that the poor want, but the wherewithal to earn a decent living.

— And will the Committee of Public Safety make that possible?

— Who knows? If oppressors and tyrants could truly be rooted out … It was my hope that liberty and democracy might be established here as in America; that the poor might have bread, that all might live free from fear and oppression. Fine words, I know, and innocent, perhaps; but it seemed then that these things were possible.

I asked him how long he had been in Paris.

— Oh, long enough to see the way things turned. He smiled a wry smile. Who is it, Manon, who prospers without fail in any time of turbulence? Not the poor, the destitute, not even when the wealth of the greedy begins to be distributed anew. It is other rogues, greedy men who use instability to increase their profits, who trade on uncertainty and insecurity, who reduce high notions of justice and progress to a matter of finance.

— You have seen this?

— In Paris I have seen rogues – not all of them Frenchmen – feasting on the misfortunes of this country.

— And you have seen the executions?

— Who could ignore them? Your father was right to remove you. It is no place for any sane person. There are few places in the country, if any, not at risk from the agents of the state, but here at least ...

— Yet you were there! I envy you that.

— Envy me what? To have seen the world collapse about me? The pandemonium of hell! He raised his voice a little, and scowled; and he seemed, momentarily, a different person. We continued to the end of the alley in silence. Then he said, But let us talk no longer on this morbid subject. The sun came out, hot on our heads, before being hidden again behind a cloud. I asked him how an Alsatian came to have a Breton name. A look of consternation crossed his face at first, then he laughed.

— My father was Alsatian, my mother Breton, he answered. She left her home when they married.

— And they still live in Alsace?

— They are both dead. My father died two years ago, my mother when I was a boy.

— And you have no brothers or sisters?

— None.

— It is not always easy, I said, to have brothers and sisters. Rosine and I are ill-matched to live together. I am closer to my brother, Henri; but he is away for most of the time now, and will not allow me to join him.

— Would you wish to leave your home here?

— I would go tomorrow if I could! You have no idea how stifling it is for me here. When this war is over, I will travel. Italy, Germany, Russia. Even England.

Turning towards me, he asked why I said, even England; he laughed, and I yearned to reach out my hand and touch the rough smoothness of his dark cheek; but I merely said, It is such a barbarous country.

— Not quite so barbarous as you believe. The people have not the same manners as the French; but they have wit too, and honest sincerity. There are lakes, green fields, fearsome mountains. And London, though less refined under normal circumstances than Paris, is a city of infinite interest. I once walked all night through its streets. The city engulfed me, I felt myself within her so alive that I thought I could stay awake for ever.

I remarked, that he must have lived some time in England since he knew it so well. A little, he said. We had reached the end of the avenue and stopped, hesitated before turning back. I wished this walk would go on for ever. My mind momentarily empty of thoughts, I looked down; his boots were covered in flecks of mud. One thing filled my head. We began to walk, slowly, back towards the château.

— And did you experience the same sense of life in Paris?

— No. Almost immediately upon my arrival, I was caught up in matters best not talked about. He fell silent; five minutes later there was the clatter of a carriage, and Rosine came running across the terrace. Look, look, she shouted, I bought three ribbons and a new bonnet! I sighed, and he turned to me and smiled, raising his eyebrows as if in complicity.

‘Then there’s a gap,’ said Mathias, scrolling through the book. ‘A couple of blank pages, scored through – look, three lines through each – and then it starts again, almost two months later.’

7th July 1794

The wind wrenches the leaves from the trees, darkness falls on the garden; hell itself rising from the depths to engulf the earth. But a cold hell, the château full of draughts*;* nowhere am I warm. I am an automaton; I go about my tasks with exactness but no

soul. I no longer eat at table – ambrosia has turned to wormwood – but take a small supper each evening in my room, enough to keep body and soul together. Even that I do against my better judgement.

Or perhaps I do it because there is one hope left to me; one forlorn hope which, because it is my only hope, becomes all-important.

This morning, a rainbow arched across the sky, from horizon to horizon almost. An illusion, a cruel mockery. Black night and fierce winds have taken me up.

11th July

I have missed my destiny. I ought to have been elsewhere. Other conditions should have ruled my life, other concatenations of events. Yet something has been let loose over this country which has shuffled chance and inevitability, so that what should happen is thwarted and the purely accidental becomes inescapable.

A brief reprieve of the weather; two days of warmth and golden sunshine; the air pulsates with heat. But no reprieve for me. The door which had half opened has clanged shut; my sentence pronounced, for a crime unspecified. I see them walking down the long avenue together; he with his hands behind his back, his coat tails swirling, his eyes turned towards her as if she were the sun itself, the source of all warmth and light, and he the heliotropic flower. She knows, as she tosses her fair curls and lifts her pretty face to his, that she is the chosen one. What he talks of with her, heaven only knows; though they find ways to spin it out through the day. Flighty, empty-headed little Rosine, not two thoughts to rub together. She lets her hair work loose and fall upon her shoulder. He sees no one but her now. Last evening I came across them in the shrubbery, uttered a strangled greeting – repeated it – but they saw me, heard me not. I do not exist.

12th July

No sound in the stillness of the night save the scratch of pen upon paper. I alone am awake. And does she sleep soundly, knowing – or not knowing – that she has robbed me of him? The screech of an owl, far away, in the silence; and some small animal is butchered, torn limb from limb, its viscera plucked out.

I am occulted and eclipsed. Invisible, a phantom, thinner with each day; but clinging to life for the one satisfaction left to me. Yet I am my own occultation. I am tall and gaunt and angular (curse God for making me thus!); my intellect, my sharpness of judgement non-existent because they are concealed beneath this exterior. When we were children, everyone would smile at her, pet her, offer her sugared

almonds, while I stood by awkward and clumsy. If I could turn myself inside out, like a glove torn from a hand, they would see, then, what it was they dealt with.

If things had turned out as they ought. But come what may. This now my destiny. Hope must surrender to fact. On the subject of facts I watch and think.

31st July

Momentous news brought this morning from Paris: the tyrant Robespierre was guillotined three days ago. The message – brought by a servant of M. Hébert – came while *they* were at breakfast. I had been walking on the terrace, but ran to the breakfast room to impart the news. There they sat in silence, as if they had reached the end of all possible conversation between them. Oh, thank God, said Rosine. But he, half rising from his seat, said he must therefore return to Paris post-haste, as he had urgent business there. No, squealed Rosine, letting her bread fall from her hand upon the table, from where it rolled onto the floor like a severed head. I poured myself a dish of coffee and asked him the nature of his urgent business, but he would not say. Of course he must go, I said, if his business demanded it; his horse had been well cared-for during his stay but he could, if he preferred, take one of ours. Rosine remained silent, her arms on the table, her head bowed, tears starting to run down her cheeks. I asked him, if he got news of our brother in Paris, to send us word.

It is over. From the window of my room, I watched him ride away down the drive. When he reached the gate of the park, he slowed a little, as if he might turn round and ride back. (And hope, inane hope, even then stirred in me.) But he spurred his black Arab into a canter and became a decreasing speck on the lane to the village. I remained at the window long after both horse and rider had ceased to be visible.

21st October

Rosine mopes around the château, listless and morose. She relies on him to save her in her predicament, writes to him every day, though she has not the courage to send her letters. She has confided to me her secret. And the fact that she and her lover – for that is what he was – quarrelled the day before the news came from Paris. She thinks that, if only he knew about the child, he would return at once to save her. I have written to Henri, demanding that he return, hoping my letter will reach him. If he is still alive.

And today – the weather, perfidious as the English – the sun shone in a haze of warmth and serenity.

5th Nov 1794

I knocked on the door of Henri's room. He is pale, has not been himself since he came home; he is much perturbed by Rosine's news. And, I suspect, by events in Paris – of which he will tell me nothing but those things which are common knowledge. I stood behind him as he sat at his mahogany escritoire, my arms folded.

— The information you have tried in vain to extract from our sister, I said quietly, I already know. He turned, half rose from his chair.

— How so? How come you know what she stubbornly refuses to reveal? Surely she has not confided in you?

I laughed, and over his shoulder looked out at the orchard, the trees now bare of leaves.

— Indeed she has; now, does that not cause you to respect my abilities?

— Tell me, then, who he is, and I can avenge her.

— Tell you I will, my dear brother. But not for nothing. And you must tell me first why she needs avenging.

— That is surely obvious!

— And do you think she had nothing to do with it?

— What do you mean?

— Do you not think she welcomed him, encouraged him? I was here, remember! I watched them day by day.

— Not closely enough, evidently. You should have protected her.

— And if you had been here, instead of doing God-knows-what in Paris, you could have protected her.

— Manon, stop this, I beg you. Just tell me who he was. I have to be sure.

— What do you mean, you have to be sure? Have you some inkling already? He said he had business with Papa – did you then send him?

— Manon, stop meddling where you have no business. I meant only that I need solid information. I demand that you tell me the rogue's name.

— Tell me what you have been up to in Paris and I will give you his name.

— Don't be ridiculous, Manon. What could I tell you? I have been in danger of my life for the past ten months. I have evaded death by a hair's breadth.

— That is no answer. I want the truth, Henri. For once in my life, the truth. I am not as naïve as you think. Tell me about Vaubon, and the American, that little clique you thought I knew nothing about.

— You cannot do this, Manon. You don't know what you are asking.

— I know very well what I am asking. Those are my conditions, upon which I refuse to negotiate.

But he stood and angrily left the room, slamming the door behind him. He will be persuaded, I am certain.

'And that's the end,' Mathias said quietly. 'The diary stops there. She didn't fill the notebook.'

Julia said nothing and they sat in silence for some time, a sadness hanging between them in the afternoon warmth.

'So Raoul Akermann was the mystery lover.'

'Whoever he was,' said Julia. 'Can I see the book?'

She turned over the pages. 'The way you read it, it sounded very controlled – more than you'd expect for a woman who's all over the place because she's been rejected.'

'That's the way it is.'

'Yes, it's strange. The bit where she's becoming infatuated with Raoul is very untidy, almost illegible in places. The sentences are very terse. Yet when she's in agony because he's jilted her, she's just as articulate as she was before. All her sentences are perfectly formed; even the writing is neater. It's as if she's in perfect control.'

The key clicked in the lock and the door opened, letting in a wedge of light from the corridor.

'Do you fancy an early dinner?' said Hélène, her immaculate lips smiling.

'I'm afraid Julia and I have to get back,' said Mathias. As Julia opened her mouth, he frowned lightly at her. She said nothing.

'Fine,' said Hélène. 'I'll see you tomorrow. But I'm leaving at three, so you'll have to be finished by then.

20.

The trial of Henri Jacques de Saint-Gilles, for High Treason

30th January 1813

IV.

Jean-Frédéric LeConte was sworn and examined by Mr Ludlow for the Crown.

Mr Ludlow: How long have you resided in this country?

LeConte: Twelve years.

Mr Ludlow: And what is your business here?

LeConte: At first I was manservant to the Chevalier de la Tour. That was how I came to this country, when he fled his native land. But after his death I was obliged to find other employment. He left me a little money – he was much reduced in circumstances – and I set up in a small way as a trader.

Mr Ludlow: What was the nature of your trade?

LeConte: I bought and sold ribbons and other small items; I think you call it 'haberdashery'.

Mr Ludlow: Mr LeConte, look well at the prisoner. Do you recognise him?

LeConte: Yes.

Mr Ludlow: By what name do you know him?

LeConte: Monsieur Henri de Lessac.

Mr Ludlow: How long have you known him?

LeConte: About four years.

Mr Ludlow: And what has been the nature of your association during those four years?

LeConte: I knew him first as a French exile in London. Later, he employed me to undertake commissions for him.

Mr Ludlow: What sort of commissions?

LeConte: The delivery of letters and packets and the like. There were many French men and women in London for whom I did the same.

Mr Ludlow: You have just told me, M. LeConte, that your business was haberdashery.

LeConte: It was. But also, because the Chevalier had taught me to speak English, so that I might better care for him here, I later began to

carry out small commissions on behalf of my exiled compatriots. I acted as a messenger and interpreter amongst the French exiles in London.

Mr Ludlow: I see. And to what places were you asked to deliver these letters and packets?

LeConte: Usually to places in and around London. Upon occasion, to other places.

Mr Ludlow: Which places?

LeConte: If I remember, to Portsmouth and Chatham.

Mr Ludlow: Mr LeConte, you have heard the testimony of Mr Joseph Barclay. Can you describe, in detail, the nature of the agreement between you and him?

LeConte: I was asked by Mons. de Lessac to arrange the delivery of some items to Calais and Boulogne. Since he was prepared to pay well for this service, I employed Mr Barclay and his cutter *Christabel* to effect this.

Mr Ludlow: So the items you gave to Mr Barclay to deliver to the French ports of Calais and Boulogne came from the man you knew as Mons. de Lessac, in other words the prisoner?

LeConte: They did.

Mr Ludlow: And were you aware of the nature of these letters?

LeConte: I believed they were letters from French émigrés in London to their families in France. There were also some which related to French prisoners in this country.

Mr Ludlow: And how were the items transferred between Mons. de Lessac and Mr Barclay?

LeConte: It was usual for me to collect the letters from Mons. de Lessac and to pass them to Mr Barclay when he came up to town.

Mr Ludlow: And this was a regular occurrence?

LeConte It was.

Mr Ludlow: What was the regularity?

LeConte About once every month.

Mr Ludlow: And this took place at number 7, Litchfield-street; is that correct?

LeConte: It is.

Mr Ludlow: Were you living at that house?

LeConte: No. It was a house used by Mons. de Lessac.

Mr Ludlow: As a residence?

LeConte: No, as a place from which to conduct his business.

Mr Ludlow: And what was the nature of Mons. de Lessac's business?

LeConte: I was ignorant of his real business. He told me he was a merchant and also that he wrote for a French news-paper circulated in London amongst the émigrés.

Mr Ludlow: And why was it that Mr Barclay used to come to Mons. de Lessac's house to collect Mons. de Lessac's letters and packets from you, his employer in this matter?

LeConte: It was because Mons. de Lessac gave me the use of the house when I was engaged upon his business. He insisted upon it, in fact.

Mr Ludlow: And how often did you attend at the house?

LeConte: At first only once a month, but subsequently there was an increase in the amount of work I was asked to carry out, and I then came to the house perhaps once or twice a week.

Mr Ludlow: Was this extra work the same as, or different from, the work you were already carrying out for Mons. de Lessac?

LeConte: He asked me to receive visitors to the house who came with letters for him.

Mr Ludlow: And these visitors came how often?

LeConte: About once a month also, but on different days. There was a constant flow.

Mr Ludlow: And the letters they brought; what did they contain?

LeConte I did not know. I was led to believe they were innocent.

Mr Ludlow: You did not read them?

LeConte: No; they were sealed. It was my job only to receive them and lock them in the desk in Mons. de Lessac's cabinet. It was he who read them.

Mr Ludlow: And how often was Mons. de Lessac at the house in Litchfield-street?

LeConte: Not often. I saw him there not more than once every month.

Mr Ludlow: And where did he live?

LeConte: Of that I am ignorant.

Mr Ludlow: Did you ever meet him at any other place, apart from that house?

LeConte: Sometimes at the Queen's Head or at other taverns and coffee-houses. Never at his home.

Mr Ludlow: How did you then communicate with him?

LeConte: Usually by letter.

Mr Ludlow: And apart from the prisoner, can you say who worked at the house at Litchfield-street?

LeConte: Dubois and Giroudet, Mons. de Lessac's two men. M. Grosmont, his assistant.

Mr Ludlow: What do you know of M. Grosmont?

LeConte: Nothing at all. I thought at the time that he was a business partner of Mons. de Lessac. I have heard that he has since returned to France.

Mr Ludlow: Yet Mr Barclay described him as your assistant.

LeConte: Mr Barclay is then mistaken.

Mr Ludlow: Can you furnish us with the names of any of the visitors to the house? You did, after all, spend some time there.

LeConte: Those who brought letters for Mons. de Lessac never gave their names. Mr Barclay I knew by name. There was a gentleman named Mr Price. Another named Mr Jellous, I think. And a Mr Sampson, but he was a mere busybody. That is all I remember.

Mr Ludlow: So each month you collected letters for Mons. de Lessac at his house, and later passed bundles of documents to Mr Barclay to carry to France, is that correct?

LeConte: Yes.

Mr Ludlow: But Mr Barclay became dissatisfied with that arrangement, did he not?

LeConte: He did.

Mr Ludlow: Can you explain the grounds for Mr Barclay's dissatisfaction?

LeConte: He was upset at what he had discovered of the contents of some of the letters.

Mr Ludlow: And what did he do?

LeConte: He came to London and made a complaint to me.

Mr Ludlow: And what was your reply to him?

LeConte: That there was nothing I could do.

Mr Ludlow: Why was there nothing you could do?

LeConte: The prisoner had threatened me, that if I stopped working for him, he would have me pursued by his men.

Mr Ludlow: Why do you think the prisoner kept two ruffians? Did this not cause you to suspect his business?

LeConte: I assumed it was because the house from which he conducted his business was in a somewhat perilous part of town.

Mr Ludlow: Mr Barclay has told us that when he complained to you about the content of the letters you were asking him to transport, you threatened to expose him as an accomplice. A remark which would imply that your relationship with the prisoner was more confidential, and your part in this business more significant, than you have given us to believe; what say you to that?

LeConte: That is not true. I did not threaten him. Mr Barclay must have mistaken my relationship with the prisoner. I was drawn into this business without knowing what he was about.

Mr Ludlow: Yet, when you were apprehended on the afternoon of the 29th of November last, you had upon your person several papers of a very incriminating nature, which you had attempted to discard from your pockets when Mr Faden and his officers arrived at the house. Does this not suggest, that – far from being a mere unwitting messenger of the prisoner – you were in fact in league with him?

LeConte: That is not true. It is true I had papers about me, but they were such as the prisoner had given me for transportation. That is all. I was ignorant of the contents and thought them to be innocuous.

Mr Ludlow: But those documents were unsealed and anyone might have glanced at them. We have heard Mr Faden, who knew nothing of this business and who understands no French, give a summary of their contents.

LeConte: So many documents passed between us, that I had never the time to look at them.

Mr Ludlow: And yet, when the officers entered the house in Litchfield-street on that afternoon, you made a dash upstairs, scattering papers on the stairs as you went, and were later found in the prisoner's cabinet trying to divest yourself of those that remained upon you. That is hardly the action of a man who believes the contents of his pockets to be innocuous.

LeConte: It was a sudden fear. When I heard the officers at the door, I guessed, that my associate had involved himself in some dirty business. Since I did not wish to be caught up in it, I tried to remove evidence of my connexion with him.

Mr Ludlow: You were not therefore surprised at your acquaintance's arrest?

LeConte: Not at the arrest, exactly. But the charge surprised me.

21.

‘And how’s your research coming along?’ asked the countess that night after dinner. They were sitting on the terrace, drinking wine and watching the sun go down.

‘We’ve found a lot of interesting material,’ said Julia.

‘And has it been of use?’

‘To some extent. It’s established that Henri de Saint-Gilles lied at his trial about the date he went to England. And his sister was convinced he was into some shady business, which might or might not have been spying; there’s no evidence either way.’

‘Of course, it’s in the nature of activities like spying that they are difficult to detect.’

‘We found the diary of Manon de Saint-Gilles,’ said Mathias. ‘Written in 1794, then abandoned.’

‘Manon was ...?’

‘One of Henri’s sisters.’

‘It was very sad,’ said Julia.

‘Though she grumbled a lot. And was rather vindictive.’

‘Perhaps so would you if you’d been in her position,’ said Julia. Then to the countess, ‘One of her neighbours – a M. Hébert – corresponded with Lavoisier. She mentions the correspondence just before Lavoisier was guillotined.’

‘Now that would be a correspondence worth finding,’ said Mathias. ‘Letters to a provincial intellectual from the greatest scientist of the day. The man who discovered oxygen.’

‘Pardon me?’ said Julia; ‘I thought it was Joseph Priestley who discovered oxygen.’

‘Joseph who?’

‘Priestley. In 1774, I think.’

‘Oh really?’

‘Yes, indeed. Joseph Priestley, the Englishman. Lavoisier discovered it independently a year or so later.’

‘It was the Frenchman, however, who understood what it was. And who gave it its name.’

‘True. Priestley called it “dephlogisticated air”.’

‘You’ve obviously not had enough wine, Julia, if you can say that word.’

‘So are you going to pour me some?’

‘If you admit Lavoisier’s supremacy as a scientist.’

‘Hardly. I can always pour my own. They met, you know,’ she said, holding out her glass. ‘Priestley and Lavoisier. Sometime in 1775, I think. Fourteen years before the Revolution. They both had a hard time because of it.’

‘I know Lavoisier was guillotined,’ said the countess; ‘but what happened to the Englishman?’

‘He was a supporter of the Revolution. His house and lab and all his equipment were burnt down by a Church-and-King mob in 1791, on the anniversary of the storming of the Bastille.’

‘There’s not much left to look at,’ said Mathias the next morning, stacking the remaining manuscripts. ‘We could be finished here by lunch time. Tomorrow I’ll show you Angoulême, if you’re interested. Or Limoges.’

‘That would be lovely. If this is our last day, I think we should take Hélène for lunch. Unless you want to go on your own.’

‘You are most kind, Mademoiselle Dalton, but that will not be necessary. Or, to put it another way, please don’t leave me alone with her. That, along with your eternal gratitude, is all I ask in return for bringing you here.’

Julia laughed. ‘It’s that bad, is it?’

‘She can be insistent in a very quiet sort of way.’

‘There was something between you, then?’

‘Yes. Not really. No.’

‘Sorry; that was obviously too difficult a question.’

‘No. It’s a question to which there are three different answers, depending on how you look at it. Yes: she is convinced there was something between us. Not really: it was a long time ago; we were both students – I was an undergraduate and she’d just started her doctorate. No: there was nothing of any import. There could be nothing. She has a fine academic mind but emotionally she’s a constrictor. She wants to eat you whole.’

‘Is that why she let you use the archives?’

‘It probably helped.’

‘Well, I’m very grateful. She must be quite a bit older than you?’

‘Nearly ten years. She must be forty-four now. Our parents were friends.’

‘I’d have thought she’d be past it at that age.’

‘That’s no doubt because you’re not yet thirty.’

They worked in silence for an hour.

‘I’ve not found anything significant amongst this stuff,’ said Julia. ‘Except possibly this. I think it’s Saint-Gilles’s handwriting, but it’s totally incomprehensible.’ She handed over a sheet of paper on which were scrawled, at various angles, several names, figures and addresses.

Jaunier, 3407 Gustave 291
Lessac 2109 Mercredi, 71 Rue Saint-Antoine
Rue Saint Honoré 43
Monsieur P, rue d’Enfer
Monsieur Lanson, rue des Cordeliers. 7012.

‘It is Henri’s writing,’ said Mathias. But, as you say, it means nothing. What do you think these names and addresses are?’

‘No idea. I hoped you might be able to shed light on them.’

‘Your guess is as good as mine. The figures could be anything: amounts of money owed, gambling debts, possibly; or, if we assume that Saint-Gilles was a spy, they might be details of contacts: other spies, people he was spying on.’

‘Or a code.’

‘Yes, but there’s no way of telling from this paper alone; nothing to cross-reference it to. Not even a date.’ He held it up to the light. ‘It’s a page from a notebook. You can see the edge here, where it’s been torn out. Nothing out of the ordinary.’

‘What do you make of the addresses?’

‘Well, they could be significant: Robespierre lived on the rue Saint-Honoré, for example; the prison, La Force, was on the rue St Antoine. But that doesn’t help. We could read a hundred meanings into all this and not arrive at the correct one.’

‘I’ll take a copy, just in case. Was there really a rue d’Enfer? Hell Street.’

‘Yes, it was on the east side of the Luxembourg, where the Boulevard Saint-Michel is now; it was demolished by Haussman. I’m afraid I’ve not found anything

useful either; some pages from an account book, a few letters, bills; just household items.'

'I know they're not relevant,' she said, leafing through her pile of documents; 'but I do find this sort of thing fascinating. Ten livres for a horse. To Jacques-Yves Vernay, for the repair of a carriage wheel. Then there's this sketch. Someone sat and drew this man's face, two hundred years ago perhaps. Real people, doing ordinary things. Oh my God.'

'What?'

'It can't be.'

'What? Julia?'

She was staring at a small sheet of paper. Aware that her hand was trembling slightly, she passed it to him across the table. 'It was at the bottom of the pile.'

'Ma chère Rosine. What does it say that is so important?'

'It's not what it says. It's who wrote it.' She took it from his hand, stared at it again. There was no mistaking the handwriting, which had become so familiar that it was almost a part of her, like an old friend's, or a lover's.

'It's Richard Turnbull. This letter was written by Richard Turnbull.'

'How can you be sure? It's not signed; there's just this initial, R'.

'I know the handwriting. It's unmistakable. Look at the way he bunches the letters together, the curl on the downward stroke of the small P. That flourish on the tail of the R.'

'So what does it say?'

At that moment they heard the key turn in the lock and Hélène appeared in the doorway. Julia quickly covered the letter with the larger pages of the account book. It was an instinctive action and she would not have been able to explain it. She followed Hélène in silence down the dimly-lit corridor, Mathias Fournier, equally silent, behind her.

It was gone two when they got back to the basement, after a three-course lunch which to Julia had seemed to go on for ever. She had eaten a carpaccio of beef, a salade Niçoise and a lemon sorbet but had tasted nothing.

'Do you need to go back to the archive?' Hélène had asked on the way back from the restaurant. 'Or have you finished?'

'We have just a couple of things to finish off,' said Mathias. 'Then we'll tidy everything up. We'll be done by three.'

‘We’ve got less than an hour,’ he said when they were sitting at the table again. ‘Though that should be more than enough time to read and copy that letter. What does it actually say?’

She read it through.

My dear Rosine, I write from Paris, though I shall soon be gone from here. My business done, I take the first packet – or any other boat – to Dover.

Presuming your lack of response to my letters to be a sign of your continued ill-feeling towards me, I can but admit that the accusation raised against me was fully warranted by facts – but not, alas, by those which you had uncovered. (I know not, though I suspect, how you came by those facts.) I beg forgiveness for the wrong I have done. Though I was not wholly what I purported to be during my stay at Ruffec, it was not my intent to cause hurt or harm. But all ventures, it seems, must end in failure of one sort or another; and love, of all ventures, is that most given to Catastrophe, whether through loathing and betrayal, or else through death.

R

Rue de la Harpe, 5 Vendémiaire

‘So Richard Turnbull was Rosine’s lover.’ She put the letter down on the table and stared at it.

‘A cheerful little note,’ he said. Then, ‘That cipher. The one drawn by Rosine under the poem at the château; the two letter Rs – do you remember it?’

‘Rosine and Raoul. Or did she know his real name was Richard? Was that what they quarrelled about?’

‘We can assume from Manon’s diary that both she and Rosine knew his real name. How they found it out, though, is hard to see.’

‘Perhaps he let it slip.’

‘Somewhat unlikely, don’t you think?’

‘Not if it was in an unguarded moment. Maybe he was drunk, or in a state of post-coital serenity. It must be very difficult, being undercover, always having to conceal your real identity. And he was only twenty.’

In the car on the way back, he said to her, ‘You’re very quiet. What’s the matter?’

‘I don’t like it. It’s too much of a coincidence. Why should he turn up here?’

‘Sometimes coincidences happen.’

‘I know. But it makes me uncomfortable. That there should be an existing connection between Richard Turnbull and Henri de Saint-Gilles before they met in London.’

‘It isn’t necessarily a coincidence.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘There are several possibilities. Hypotheses which fit the facts. Do you fancy a drink? This village is worth seeing. It’s called Confolens. The confluence of two rivers.’ He parked in a small square opposite a café.

‘Confluence,’ said Julia, adding sugar to her citron pressé, ‘that’s what this is all about. ‘People coming together, separating again. Except I’ve no idea why. So what are your hypotheses?’

He stretched his legs out under the table and unbuttoned his waistcoat. ‘First of all, the events we’re dealing with could be purely contingent. As I said, coincidences do sometimes happen. Richard Turnbull arrives at Ruffec in 1794 for whatever reason. He’s using a false name, so he could be engaged in espionage or some other sort of clandestine activity, but we don’t know. He distracts himself with the daughters, has an affair with Rosine, leaves before Henri’s arrival. It’s then an entire coincidence that he and Henri de Saint-Gilles become friends in – when was it?’

‘1810. That’s the bit I don’t like.’

‘But you have to admit that it’s possible.’

‘But unlikely. What’s the second option?’

‘We keep the original scenario for Richard’s arrival at the château – pure chance. But what if Saint-Gilles found out his identity and went looking for him in London in 1810?’

‘But why leave it all that time? Why not go straight away?’

‘I don’t know. Perhaps it took him that long to find out. Perhaps Rosine and Manon each refused to reveal his identity, for different reasons.’

‘And why conceal his real purpose in London? I’ve come across nothing so far to suggest that they were anything but good friends.’

‘So as better to exact his revenge? I don’t know.’

‘And the third possibility is?’

‘The one which, I suspect, you will find most acceptable: that there was a pre-existing connection between Saint-Gilles and Turnbull. We posit that they met in Paris. Henri sends Richard to the château for some reason – to carry out a task,

perhaps, or maybe just to wait out the Terror, if things had got too hot for him in Paris.'

'Yes, he does take off again as soon as the news comes through of the Thermidorean coup. But it still doesn't explain Henri's behaviour between returning home in 1794 and meeting Richard in London in 1810. Or the fact that he then befriends him. That just doesn't make sense.' She paid for the drinks and they walked down to the river.

'You seem to know this area very well.'

'I grew up in this village. I've not been back for sixteen, seventeen years, though, except for the occasional visit; Christmas and so on. Once I went to Paris, that was it.'

'I did the same. Got out and went to university in London, spent a year in Paris. Except I ended up going back after all, for a while. Do your parents still live here?'

'They moved to Angoulême when they retired; it's easier to get about, and that's where my mother was born. They're on holiday at the moment; otherwise I could have taken you to meet them.'

'Wouldn't they get the wrong idea?'

'Perhaps. Would it matter?'

'I suppose not. Do you think parents are all the same?'

'I don't know; I've only had experience of two.'

She laughed, was silent for a while. 'My parents think I'm engaged to a man called Patrick.'

'And you're not?'

'No.'

'So how did they come to that conclusion?'

'I told them. I lied.'

'And what does Patrick think about it?'

'He doesn't exist. He's a ghost, a shadow; I made him up.' He was one of the problems she'd have to deal with when she got home. That, and finding somewhere to live. For now, she put it out of her mind, stared down at the clear water passing under the bridge, the stones on the river bed.

'Do you have many imaginary friends, Miss Dalton? Or imaginary fiancés? I have a neighbour in Paris who is a psychoanalyst, if you need help.'

‘Very funny. He’s not an imaginary friend. It was a barefaced lie, to get me out of a tricky situation. With hindsight, it probably wasn’t the most efficient solution to the problem, but it was the best I could do in the circumstances. I don’t know why I’m telling you this; it doesn’t show me in a good light, does it?’ She turned round, leant her back against the parapet of the bridge. ‘God, things can get so complicated sometimes. I wish I could just get on with my work.’

‘But would your work be the better for it?’

‘What do you mean?’

‘That if you want to recreate and interpret the events of the past, it’s probably advantageous to have some personal experience of the sordid contingencies of life.’

‘I like that phrase. Sordid contingencies. A lot of life falls into that category, doesn’t it?’

‘Indeed it does.’

‘The problem, of course, is that it’s the contingent events of the past which it’s hard to account for, precisely because they’re contingent.’

‘Exactly. Which is why, without a certain number of facts, we have only hypothesis. And another problem,’ he added, with a sardonic smile, ‘is the reliability of first-person accounts. In the light of your recent confession, how can I believe anything you say?’

‘You don’t. How can we ever know whether what we hear, or read, is the truth? I suppose you can make assumptions – that most people are truthful most of the time, that diary accounts are usually honest, that sort of thing. So Manon’s diary can be assumed to give a more-or-less accurate picture of events, even though it’s skewed by her point of view, her take on events. But that’s the problem. If you knew that nothing I said was true that would be easy. It’s the inconsistency which makes things difficult. There’s a scientific aspect to history, but it’s not entirely a scientific subject. There are no Newtonian laws. It’s more like quantum theory.’

‘Don’t tell me you understand quantum theory?’

‘Does anyone? Even real physicists struggle with it by all accounts. But I have a broad idea. I’ve got a friend who’s a physicist.’

‘A real one?’

‘A real physicist? Yes. She’s at Cambridge; she’s going to work at CERN next year. I’m hoping she’ll invite me.’

‘I meant a real friend. As opposed to an imaginary one.’

‘Are you going to tease me constantly about that?’

‘Maybe. But tell me why history is more like quantum theory than classical physics.’

‘Because of uncertainty. Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle states that we can determine either the position or the momentum of a subatomic particle, but not both at the same time.’

‘Why not?’

‘The act of observation introduces energy into the experiment and thus changes the state of the object. So what we observe is altered by the very fact of our observing it.’

‘You mean that different people see the same subject in different ways?’

‘No; it’s got nothing to do with subjectivity; that’s another matter entirely – albeit a very pertinent one in historical research. And it’s not to do with any technical inadequacy, either; it seems to be a fundamental law of nature. And I suppose if I extend my metaphor, that means I can’t separate myself from what I’m researching. Niels Bohr said that the answers you get from nature depend on the questions you ask of it. I’m also beginning to feel with Richard Turnbull that I can see one side of him or another – spy or government man, perhaps; loyal subject or traitor – but not both at the same time. He’s ambiguous, like light.’

‘What does that mean?’

‘The fundamental proposition of quantum theory is that light – and following on from that, all matter – is dual. Light is both wave and particle, and therefore ambiguous.’

‘I don’t find that so startling. I’d say it’s obvious to any thinking person that reality is ambiguous.’

‘Fair point. But quantum theory seems to underpin that, by saying that the material universe, as well as the social or cultural one, is founded on ambiguity.’

Back at the château, Julia asked the countess about the guest rooms. ‘There was one called the blue room in the late eighteenth century.’

‘They were always described by their colours. They still are, even though they’ve been redecorated a thousand times. Maurice wanted to restore the original colour schemes – he had the plans of the work carried out by Alexandre Duplessis

in the 1760s. But I put my foot down at blue. It's so cold and ghastly. I'll show you.'

Julia stood with her hands in her trouser pockets, staring round the large and airy room. So. Richard Turnbull slept here. A curtained bed, a wash-stand; a desk and an easy chair.

'I think the bed is original. The rest is from the right period – Maurice was a stickler for that sort of thing; but so much was damaged during the war – we had to replace it ourselves.'

'I still can't believe it. I came here almost on the off-chance, to see what I could find out about Henri de Saint-Gilles. And it turns out that his sister had an affair with the very man who was responsible for having Saint-Gilles arrested as a spy nineteen years later.'

'He was an acquaintance of Henri?'

'At that time, we're not sure. It seems they didn't meet here. Richard had left before Henri came back from Paris. But they knew each other later in London.'

'A friendship which is now full of question marks,' said Mathias, who was looking out of the window.

'It was worth coming, then?' asked Ghislaine.

'Definitely. I'm so grateful. To you both. Although what I've learnt rather complicates matters than otherwise.' Then, to Mathias, 'When did Rosine die? What was the date of that letter we read in Henri's study?'

'On Monday?'

'Was it only Monday? It seems like an age ago.'

'1808. October, I think,' he said, without turning his head.

'So if she died in 1808, and Henri is in London in 1810 or shortly before, it's possible that the two are connected. Henri may have been motivated by her death to seek out the lover who'd abandoned her. Though that might just be a case of *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*.'

'And what was the outcome of this affair?' said Ghislaine. She was sitting in the armchair, hands in her lap.

Mathias turned from the window, sat on the deep sill.

'They quarrelled, he left, she had his baby and died fourteen years later.'

'And did he know – what was he called, your Englishman?'

'Richard Turnbull.'

‘Did he know, this Richard, that his lover was pregnant?’

‘Apparently not. There’s no evidence that he ever knew about the child.’

‘Sex, death and spying against the backdrop of the Revolution,’ said Ghislaine. ‘Perhaps you should write a novel.’

‘It might pay more than academic work,’ said Mathias.

‘I wish,’ said Julia. ‘But if I wrote it, it wouldn’t be that sort of novel. So it wouldn’t pay. Even in France, perhaps.’

‘Such a sad story,’ said Ghislaine. ‘To think that all this happened under my roof and I never knew about it.’

22.

Each night the same ritual. At seven o’clock he sees out the last of his customers. Goodnight, sir; Goodbye, Mrs Harding; take care, now. The last embers of the day’s urbanity, the suave smile fading as the café empties. He clangs the iron grille shut and locks it; locks the café door, pulls down the blinds, sets the alarm. Alone now, in his silent house, until Mrs Fanshawe comes in to clean at six the next morning. He clears up the last of the crockery: the white plates strewn with mustard and relish, crusts and fondant icing; the teapots and cafetières. The dregs of a human day, the physical remnants of intimate chats, subdued arguments, solitary ecstasies. An untidy lot, the human race, their emotions and steamy dramas spilling out like the bits of mashed-up apple pie or globs of cream and jam they leave behind. The law of entropy; they will always take his beautiful concoctions and mess them up. Only two of his regular customers eat tidily: an old woman who comes in punctiliously late every Thursday afternoon and stays for the best part of an hour, reading long nineteenth-century novels; and a young man, little more than a boy, who always orders a large black coffee and a slice of chocolate fudge cake. He sits in Henri’s place if it is free, in the corner by the dimpled window, under the plaque.

Once the dishwasher is gurgling in the background Peter starts to relax, breathe deeply, take in his solitude. The silence and the stillness always startle him after the noise and bustle of the day, as if he has never experienced them before. By the time he locks the internal door to the café, he has cast off the other, the man of the day, the friendly, smiling café owner. Carrying the tray of food he has set aside, he climbs

the stairs to his private kitchen. He won't eat the café leftovers, even if they're untouched in their refrigerated glass cabinets. If they cannot be kept till the next day, he puts them in the bin or allows George to take his pick after his shift. Each morning, Peter makes a selection from among his prepared dishes and puts it on one side. This Thursday evening he has on his tray a bowl of chilled gazpacho, a plate of bruschetta topped with anchoïade, and a slice of flapjack three-quarters of an inch thick, full of sugar and syrup and coarse-milled organic oats. He has a long evening ahead. Over one end of his polished dining table he meticulously lays a white damask cloth with a laced edging. Sewn by nuns at the convent school attended by his mother. Each pupil was presented on her last day with some such hand-made item: an embroidered tablecloth, an ornamental bed runner or a set of antimacassars. A gift for her trousseau. There was something curious, Peter had always thought, about nuns preparing girls for marriage and homemaking (for that, apart from the religious studies, had been the main thrust of his mother's education: five years of domestic training with some algebra and catechism thrown in, a smattering of French and Shakespeare and a few fragments of history on the side). On the cloth he places his plates and bowl and from the dresser drawer the silver pistol-handled Georgian cutlery: soup spoon, knife, fork and cake knife. Finally, a stiff, creamy-white napkin.

He eats slowly, savouring each mouthful. If it weren't for his cosmopolitan food and the occasional sound of traffic from the street below, he could be an eighteenth-century gentleman sitting at this mahogany dining table. Joseph Turner, perhaps, who owned the house from 1769 to 1792, or Joseph his son who kept it till 1819 when he sold up and emigrated to America with his wife and six surviving children. Turner's coffee house had flourished well into the nineteenth century. What it had been before, Peter had been unable to find out. Had the younger Joseph sat here in this room with his wife and children, dining hurriedly before a stint in the shop below? Going down to serve drinks with his wife Anne, who made up bowls of punch and plates of toasted cheese as well as coffee. On the lookout for aggressive punters ready for a fight; keeping an eye on the government nark tucked away in a corner booth listening behind a news-sheet for seditious words or insults to the king. Henri had known the younger Joseph, who had been present at the time of both his arrests and testified in court on his behalf: on the first occasion that he had not uttered the words he had been accused of; and on the second to his good character. Hard to prove that someone isn't a spy.

Between the bruschetta and the flapjack, Peter pushes back his chair and plods into the kitchen to make a pot of Earl Grey. The meal is a transition from one world, one persona, to the next. Food for the body and for the soul, a solitary communion. Eating is an act of continuity; a reminder and a consecration of his fleshliness, which links him not just with the common mass around him (whom he likes well enough as long as they are in their place, separated by counter and apron) but with *him*, the ancestor, who is in some strange way also himself. For Saint-Gilles is identity as well as other. Stephanie had told him once that there came a point in a relationship when you knew the other's thoughts, instinctively. 'It's like a sixth sense,' she'd said one night as they sat side by side on their white Habitat settee, eating crisps. 'Like living in someone else's mind as well as your own. I wonder when we'll get to be like that.' Never, as it had turned out. It wouldn't have happened even if they'd stayed together. Peter's mind was sealed to all but one. The iron grille had clanged shut and Henri alone crossed that barrier. It was as Stephanie had said. They were one.

That he was one with – that he shared his fleshliness with – what the outside world would call a ghost, which had no fleshliness at all, didn't trouble him. It made no sense, perhaps, in the way that the world expected things to make sense; but it was a reality nonetheless. A conjunction of opposites.

While he ate he prepared himself. Reached back into the depths of his mind, down through time, into that world of crystalline reality which was layered beneath the everyday and the humdrum. It was not with the knowledge of learning or of reason that he knew; on the contrary, it was through the eyes of the soul, of insight, of a quasi-divine Sophia into which he had been initiated, that he saw his ancestor and the truth that surrounded him. There was only so much, and only a particular sort of knowledge, that could be gained through the intellect. The most important things came not thus but through the heart; the spiritual eye that saw not by the light of reason, or of facts painstakingly accumulated over years, but by lightning flashes of instinct. This was knowledge which knew, beyond doubt.

The meal over, the white bowl and plates stashed in the dishwasher, the silver cutlery washed in hot soapy water, polished on a fresh tea-towel and replaced in its drawer, he mounts now to the top floor, to the third stage of his day; unlocks the attic. The meeting place. As he crosses the threshold, he is transformed into the other Peter. And there is work to do.

It is around nine o'clock when he reaches the study. A glass of wine from the decanter on the sideboard. A slight inclination of the head in the direction of the chair opposite the desk; for Henri is always there, even though his bodily presence is bestowed sparingly, at one time of year only.

The fact that he knew Saint-Gilles's story didn't mean he could ignore the documentary evidence. It had to be dealt with. It was what they relied on. But he'd play them at their own game, produce a document that was every bit as authentic as theirs, one which gave the true version of events. And it was authentic, because Henri was its origin.

Peter has scoured the country for evidence. For the past few years his rare days off, when he leaves George in charge of the café, have been spent ferreting out documents, visiting museums, private collections, auctions, a few libraries. Drue Paulin has come up trumps. And then there's the large box of documents bought from that place in Cumbria, what was its name? Bank House. That awful woman, brash and vulgar, with the blonde-dyed hair, had no idea of what she was selling, though she drove a hard bargain for it. Refused to be talked down. Still, he wasn't complaining. An unexpected windfall, if an expensive one.

To his relief, there was nothing in the documents he'd read so far to exonerate Turnbull. A few cryptic comments that could well be interpreted as an admission of guilt. That was all he needed. He could manage the rest himself. He sharpens his pens, checks the pounce pot – a genuine late eighteenth-century pot containing fine sand to sprinkle over the wet ink. He'd picked it up at Sotheby's a few years back. Tonight begins a new phase; time for the notebook.

He works slowly, a schoolboy struggling with an important essay, immersed in the world inside his head. With the first marks of the pen – with what ease he can now form these characters, another's handwriting, on this paper! – he knows he has passed a turning-point. He stretches his aching fingers. We'll see what Miss high-and-mighty Dalton thinks of this. How old must she be? Twenty-five? Thirty? Older than most students, but not by much. Still young enough to have exalted ideas about the truth. Either it happened this way or it didn't. Always banging on about the evidence, as if there was only one truth and she had rights to it. Thinking the evidence is something out there to be discovered.

He puts down his fine-nibbed, left-handed quill and waits for the ink to dry. Then he flicks back through the closely-written pages and reads from the beginning:

When I drew near to London in the year 1825, and stood looking down at the city from the village of Hampstead, I wondered that I had been so eager to leave it.

At the end of the first four paragraphs, there was a small space and Richard Turnbull's account continued:

Thwarted always in my intention of steady writing. Only three pages filled, after which a hiatus of two months, during which time I have been almost prostrate with a fever. Thus it is that my hand trembles as it holds the pen; my grip wavers slightly. A strange illness, reminiscent of that one, so long ago – when Montagu nursed me – almost twenty years ago – after that dreadful, truly dreadful time. That illness I perhaps brought upon myself; for, as Dr. Haygarth has shown, the imagination is cause of many a disease and it is perhaps true that our actions have consequences not only in the world at large but in our bodies.

Clapham I found much changed from the village I had known; an increase both of population and of dwellings. The house in which I had lived so happily with Mr Bellas, now somewhat dilapidated, had become a lodging-house for old soldiers; ragged, sad-looking men who struggled to earn even a little money. Men spewed out by the country they had risked life and limb to protect, men who ailed still, ten years after the end of that debilitating war – a war now gone cold.

But I understood that I too had changed much, after an absence of twelve years. How carefree the man who first looked upon the Common and sat with a dish of coffee at Turner's! (Mr Turner lived no longer in Clapham; he had gone with his wife and children to America, in search of a better life, Montagu told me. The shop was run by another, but I had neither the will nor the desire to enter it.)

How swift, how bleak, the shadow which fell across that place, all those years ago!

It was in London that I was initiated into dark and secret ways. I learnt, not those things my father intended me to learn, but others; I gave myself body and soul to a mechanism it has been impossible to flee; which, like the city itself, has kept its arms – or its tentacles – about me. I was formed within the embrace of a monster, its imprint upon me inerasable.

A hacking cough – but I do not yet cough blood, merely a green and viscous phlegm. A pain in my chest, a feeling of such weariness that I sometimes wish I might die. But before death I must accomplish one task; it is for that I have procured this notebook.

23.

On the last evening of their stay at Ruffec, the countess organised a dinner. ‘I like to entertain on Friday evenings in the summer,’ she said. ‘In the winter I never feel quite well enough.’ Marie-Odette, Polvier, guests from the neighbouring farms were invited, as well as the village mayor Mme René and her husband Armand. Marie-France and the gardener Vaclav, a young Czech who spoke impeccable French with a grotesque accent, but no English, had set up a long table on the terrace and laid it with a thick white cloth, silver cutlery and ancient china.

Julia had spent the day in Angoulême with Mathias Fournier, exploring the old town, walking along the ancient ramparts. They had stood and looked up at the façade of the Romanesque cathedral; he had pointed out to her the sculpted frieze which depicted scenes from the *Chanson de Roland*.

‘Do you know the *Chanson*?’ he asked.

‘Not really; I never did any mediaeval stuff. I just know Roland’s dictum, “Pagans are wrong, Christians are right.” It has an alarming resonance in the modern world, don’t you think?’

‘It certainly does. I’ll send you the monograph I wrote on it. A fine piece of writing, but it got me into trouble.’

‘How come?’

He chuckled. ‘I compared the *Chanson* to a historical novel. The battle of Roncevaux, which we see here, took place in 778. The text was written nearly four hundred years later, and changes significant details.’

She stared up at Roland hacking off the Saracen king’s arm. ‘And? That doesn’t sound very contentious to me.’

‘I made some disparaging comments about the relationship of the historical novel to the discipline of history. Surprisingly, some of my literary colleagues took umbrage.’

‘Why surprisingly?’

She caught a look of disdain. ‘The historical novel has nothing to recommend it in a historian’s eyes. A mere embroidery of the facts, wouldn’t you agree?’

‘Not at all. You’ve obviously not read the same historical novels that I have.’

*

Now, in the half-hour before the guests arrived, Julia walked in the alley under the arching lime trees (replanted, the countess had told her, after the war). Hands in pockets, she imagined Richard Turnbull walking there with Manon and Rosine. To think that he had walked here.

'He broke hearts, this Turnbull of yours,' said Mathias, behind her.

'He's almost broken mine.'

'Why do you say that?'

'I don't know, it just slipped out. I suppose I feel in some ways that this man is more real to me than the people around me. Than some of the people around me. He lives in my head all the time; there are times when that seems more real than what we call reality. Don't listen to what I'm saying,' she said as they turned back towards the fields, 'or you really will think I'm insane.'

'There are so many unanswered questions,' she said a few moments later. 'Why did Richard turn his attentions from Manon to Rosine? Manon seems to have believed he liked her. Why did Rosine and Richard quarrel? Why did he come here in the first place? And why didn't he ever come back?'

'You don't know that he never came back.'

'True. But there's no evidence that he did. He seems not to have known about the child.'

'That must be what used to be the de Troussys' lake,' he said, pointing towards the west. 'Manon mentions it in her diary.'

She stood and looked out over the fields. 'And her destiny split down the middle. Though I'd say it was more of a large pond.'

They turned again and started slowly back towards the château, its windows rectangles of blazing orange in the early-evening sun.

'You know, you may never find the answers to your questions,' he said, turning towards her.

'Don't tell me.' She pulled a wry face. 'But I suppose it's something to have been able to ask the questions. To have got this far.'

After the entrée Mme René asked, 'What do you do, Julia?'

'I'm a PhD student and I teach French part-time in a language school. I'm currently chasing two eighteenth-century gentlemen round the country. Round two countries actually: France and England.'

‘But she also has her hand on the scientific pulse,’ said Mathias. ‘We were discussing quantum theory yesterday.’

‘I did physics at A-level – that’s sort of equivalent to the bac. Physics and maths with French and history. I was lucky; it’s not that usual to mix science and humanities at that level in England.’

‘I consider it,’ said Jean-Paul, one of the local farmers, ‘to be a tragedy of modern life that one can no longer be a polymath. At best we can only have a superficial awareness of the most important aspects of knowledge.’

‘But it’s impossible to have an in-depth knowledge of everything,’ said Polvier. ‘There’s just too much knowledge, too much information. It’s the curse of the modern age.’

‘Did you know,’ said Mme René, ‘that if you read one book a week for fifty years, you’d get through fewer than three thousand? Such a tiny fraction of all the books you could read, should read.’

‘That’s exactly what I mean.’

‘And that’s assuming you did nothing else, like looking after the animals. And one’s husband.’

‘Mother-in-law.’

‘Teenage children.’

‘But the beasts give a certain pathos to life, don’t you think? With their trusting eyes and their animal warmth?’

‘The cows, maybe. Not the mother-in-law. She’s got eyes like daggers and doesn’t trust me further than she can throw me. Never has.’

‘I wonder why. But just think: you’ll be a father-in-law soon enough. Isn’t your son engaged to that girl from Niort? The one with the incredibly long hair and the tattoos?’

‘Tattoos. Where’s she got tattoos?’

‘Don’t ask.’

‘And how do you know that?’

‘Don’t ask that either. But what do you think she’ll be saying about you when you’re seventy?’

As darkness fell, Vaclav lit candles and Marie-France brought out a platter of cheese and a large bowl of salad.

‘Rabbit food,’ said Mathias. ‘I’ll stick to the cheese. What do you call this sort of lettuce in English?’

‘La mâche? Lamb’s lettuce. It’s my favourite. I’ve eaten so well here; I must have eaten more in a week than I have in the previous six months.’

‘Then you’re not looking after yourself,’ said Ghislaine. ‘Food feeds the mind as well as the body.’

‘That’s what my old piano teacher used to say.’

‘You didn’t tell me you play the piano,’ said Mathias. ‘If you come to Paris again, we can play together. I’ve got a couple of Shostakovich sonatas for cello and piano.’

‘I don’t think so. I’ve not practised properly for years. I only play when I go back to my parents’ house. The piano’s not a convenient instrument; very expensive and not at all portable.’

‘You’d have been welcome to play my old Bechstein,’ said Ghislaine.

‘I don’t think the Bechstein would have appreciated it. Or your ears.’

Night came on and colour seeped from the landscape. The candle flames flickered in the breeze. Julia began to feel chilly; excusing herself, she ran upstairs to fetch a jacket. She was rushing down again when she stopped by the window on the landing outside her room, from which she could look down over the terrace, and beyond that the lawn and the avenue of linden trees. For a moment she glanced down at the table. Polvier was whispering something in the ear of Mme René, who was smiling, a brightly-manicured hand on her ample bosom. Mathias was gesticulating in a conversation with Marie-Odette; they were laughing; she caught the words ‘American president’. Somebody else, a woman, was saying, ‘The Handel oratorios deserve to be better known.’ Then, in the twilight – half-day, half-night, an in-between time not one or the other – that scene faded and she saw instead not the dinner table on the terrace, Mathias and Marie-Odette, the disarrayed table like a bed which has been slept in, but Richard Turnbull in his black new-style redingote, striding down the linden alley, Manon and Rosine by his side. All week she had lived with these characters, seen them in her mind’s eye; pondered over events which had taken place here but at a remove of over two hundred years. But now it was as if she saw; they moved in front of her eyes. It was the year 1794; the Terror was raging, but in this peaceful garden Richard Turnbull walked calmly under the trees with Manon and Rosine de Saint-Gilles. Yet she, Julia, had the taste of *pain de campagne* and the local wine in her mouth. She was not given to flights of fancy. Manon, tall and

angular, in a dress of grey stripes, her hair carelessly tied up, striding by Richard's side, Rosine in pink and ribbons, skipping, reaching her hand up to pick leaves from the trees. Julia squeezed her eyes tight shut and when she opened them again the vision had passed. Yet the impression of it remained. She had seen Richard Turnbull, if only in a dubious moment of psychological abandonment.

Walking slowly down the wide polished staircase, her head full of what she had just seen, she returned to the table and its gaiety. Fournier was demonstrating how you could ignite a sugar lump which had been steeped in eau de vie. As she slipped back into her seat next to his, he half-raised his eyebrows but said nothing. 'That's probably the best use for that stuff,' said Ghislaine. 'Maurice used to make it, but it's disgusting. It's been hanging around for years.'

When the party had broken up and the guests had gone home, though it was late, Julia and Mathias sat with Ghislaine in armchairs in her downstairs sitting room, the french windows open on another section of the terrace, while Vaclav and Marie-France cleared the table.

'A full moon tonight,' said Mathias, pointing above the trees. 'Look; it's quite beautiful.'

'Actually, it's still a fraction gibbous. It'll be full tomorrow.'

'Julia, do you have no poetry in your soul?'

'Perhaps not; but a fine eye for accuracy. Though I wasn't disputing its beauty. I'd say a knowledge of the moon's phases – its constant shift in shape because of its movement and our own – can only add to its charm.'

'Maybe. What happened to you when you went for your jacket?'

'Why do you ask that?'

'When you came back to the table, you looked as though you'd seen a ghost.'

'It was as if I had. I had a strange experience. I don't believe in ghosts, I don't do spiritual experiences.' She put her head in her hands for a moment, then breathed deeply. 'It was like a vision. I don't believe in that sort of thing, but when I stood at the window and looked out, down at the terrace – as I've done so many times this week – it seems I've lived here an age, not just five days! – I saw Richard Turnbull walking down the alley, with Manon and Rosine. Just a trick of the mind, no doubt. – I suppose I've been immersed in this stuff for so long now; and I am a little ...'

'Obsessive?'

‘I was going to say “a little tipsy”. Though I suppose I am a bit obsessive. And it’s been an exciting week, and in the twilight ... But at the time, for a few seconds, or minutes perhaps, it was real; or at least indistinguishable from reality.’

‘We’ll have to look after ourselves this morning,’ said Ghislaine the next day; ‘I’ve given Marie-France the day off since she worked so hard yesterday.’

‘That’s no problem,’ said Julia; ‘I look after myself all the time.’ She filled the kettle and placed it on the ancient Aga. Ghislaine lifted down three enormous breakfast cups. ‘I suppose Mathias is joining us? He’s usually up by now.’

‘I presume so. He doesn’t always sleep, apparently.’

‘You don’t know each other that well, then?’

‘No, not well at all.’

‘There’s bread if you want it; but I always have croissants at the weekend. I bought six.’

‘You’ve been out already?’

‘I’m up at five every morning. I don’t sleep so well either. Though in my case I think it’s life’s last bid to make the most of the time I have left.’

Fournier appeared in the doorway. ‘Sorry, am I late? I overslept.’

‘It’s the country air,’ said the countess.

‘Or the wine,’ said Julia.

He poured coffee and Julia put the croissants in a basket. ‘Am I hung-over,’ she said, ‘or are those cups not quite circular?’

‘The cups are misshapen,’ said Fournier with a chuckle; ‘but that doesn’t mean you’re not hung-over.’

‘Is that a philosophical quibble, or a comment on my physical state?’

‘They’re deliberately misshapen,’ said Ghislaine.’ I bought them at the market in Confolens last year.’

‘Quibble it may be,’ he said, dunking a piece of croissant into his coffee; ‘but a significant one.’

‘What do you mean?’ said Ghislaine.

‘The cups could be circular, but we could all be hung-over and all perceive them as misshapen. And because we agreed on it, we’d see that as reality. But we’d all be mistaken. It’s a fundamental problem of philosophy.’

‘But,’ said Julia, ‘the illusion would only last until you measured them. The cups. It’s not that difficult to establish that something’s circular or not.’

‘You have a commendable desire for exactitude.’

‘Well, it works, doesn’t it?’

‘For the cups, I concede it does. But if we take the cups as symbolic of other things in life, then not necessarily. Could you pour some more coffee? Then we need to get going.’

On the long drive back he said, ‘You must come to Paris again and give a résumé of your findings at Ruffec to my uncle’s society.’

‘I’d love that.’

‘In fact, I could probably arrange for you to become a member. Jean-Michel has some strict – and rather bizarre – criteria for membership, but he was quite taken with you.’

‘I think I’d rather stand on my intellectual integrity.’

‘I didn’t mean that. Though I have to admit that Jean-Michel is a little like Freud: in the end, with him, everything comes down to sex. But he was impressed with your work.’

‘Actually, I’d love membership of the society. I felt at home there. But I’m not separated or divorced, so I don’t belong.’

‘Neither am I.’

‘But you’re a privileged being.’

‘In actual fact, I’m a widower.’

‘What? God, I’m sorry. But you might have told me.’

‘I’ve stopped telling people; it changes the way they see you. And women either become excessively motherly and full of pity, or else think they should go to bed with you as an act of solace.’

‘And you thought I might fall into one of those categories?’

‘It’s hard to tell at first. I suppose I know you better now.’

He dropped her on the rue Lafayette and she stood for a moment with her suitcase beside her, watching the black Toyota become a speck amongst the late Saturday-afternoon traffic.

24.

There was a spot two hundred yards down the road from the Blue Teapot from which Miles, if he sat in his passenger seat, could observe the comings and goings at the café. He'd taken to driving past whenever his work took him that way and he was alone; sometimes, on his way home or on a day off, he would park down the narrow street and sit, silent and unseen, watching. But there was nothing out of the ordinary. A constant stream of customers during the day – the place was popular – but no action after seven in the evening, when Marchmont locked the doors and disappeared inside. He rarely left the place. Miles had spent a couple of evenings watching the back entrance to the building, walking up and down a narrow alley, leaning nonchalantly against a wall under a clammy drizzle. The fat man went to bed early. All the lights were off by nine; after that, nothing.

Miles had returned to the café as a customer on several occasions, drinking coffee, eating lunch. It wasn't his style, dolcelatte paninis and frothy coffee; he'd rather have gone down the pub for a steak and kidney pie and a pint of bitter, but it was work and it had to be done. Marchmont was up to no good. You only had to look at him to see that. Shifty, self-contained little bugger had 'criminal' written all over him. Furtive meetings after dark, brown envelopes; bent as a five-bob note. It was his grandfather's phrase, though he had no idea what it meant. Marchmont's lack of a criminal record meant nothing; just that he hadn't been caught. Yet.

'I used to live in Primrose Hill,' he'd said. It was an easy task for a detective sergeant – and Miles was good at what he did – to find the address of the house in which Marchmont and his now-dead mother had lived. You're not the only one who can go digging around in the past. Further investigation had revealed that family life had not been entirely normal for the young Peter. On the night of 2nd March 1965, officers had been called to a disturbance at number 68, Cunningham Road. A routine domestic, the sort of thing that goes on all over the city, now as then; violent men, often drunk, the occasional violent woman. But by the time the police had arrived in Cunningham Road the violent man in question, John Marchmont, had disappeared. He hadn't slunk back later that night, or the next day, looking for reconciliation or vengeance, a new start which would fade as quickly as the flowers he brought as a peace offering. John Marchmont, born 15th April 1931, five feet eleven inches, dark

brown hair, blue eyes, no distinguishing features, not believed to be dangerous, had never been seen again.

His wife Joan alleged that he'd become violent during the course of a marital row. He'd thrown a chair across the room and pushed her against the wall, called her a 'dirty rotten bitch' and a 'stinking cow'. The housekeeper, a Mrs Alice Seymour, confirmed these facts and reported that Mr Marchmont had walked out of the house at ten past nine precisely, slamming the front door so hard that one of its stained glass panes had cracked. That was the last anyone had seen of him.

'Sir, you wanted to know about those two officers called to a house in Cunningham Road in 1965.'

'You've traced them?'

'Mark Harris emigrated to New Zealand in the early eighties.'

'Fuck. He was the sergeant? And the other one?'

'Vincent Johnson. Retired six years ago.'

'Don't tell me. The States? Australia?'

'Southend.'

'Why the hell would anyone want to retire to Southend?'

'Search me. I'm going straight back to Glasgow when my time's up.'

'Well, at least it's within striking distance. Do we have an address? Phone number?'

'No phone number; just an address.'

The cold grey of the English sea in its flat monotony brought back memories of Blackpool and Whitby; sand blown into tuna sandwiches; beach cricket, fish and chips. That was before his parents could afford to take them to Benidorm or Ibiza. Miles preferred the lazy heat of the Mediterranean to the British summer. Greek salads and beer by the hotel pool. If only Julia would leave her work long enough for a proper holiday.

Vincent Johnson had remembered the incident, but refused to talk over the phone. 'Never know who's listening in. And it's not just MI5 you've got to worry about. Government's always been unscrupulous, but now it's gone through the roof.' So Miles had driven to Southend on his next day off. Johnson's house was a small semi five minutes from the front. The door was opened by a woman who introduced

herself as Bindy Johnson. She wore bright blue overalls which, from the way they were unbuttoned, suggested she was wearing nothing else. A cascade of loosely-curled auburn hair reached to her shoulders. Dyed, thought Miles; she must be fifty-five if she's a day.

'Miles, darling, come in. Vince is late home, as usual. Why break a habit of forty years? Come up to my studio.' He followed her up two flights of narrow stairs into a converted attic, in which stood an easel, a large table stacked with mounts and canvases, pots of brushes, tins and tubes of paint.

'You're an artist?'

'I'm a dabbler,' she said, putting her hand on his arm. It was a large hand with long fingers and dark orange nails; he could feel its warmth through his sleeve. 'I taught art for thirty years; stupid me. Thirty years of bored kids and boring colleagues – no real men in teaching. At least not where I taught. But in my heart I'm a painter. It's too late to do it properly now, but I can pretend.' She ran her hand over a canvas. 'The beach at midnight. You wouldn't have known that if I hadn't told you, would you?' Miles shook his head. 'It's abstract.' She put her hands in the pockets of her overalls. 'There was always a living to earn, children to bring up, a mortgage, a pension. So now I dabble. Just dabble. What do you think?' she asked Miles, who was looking at a set of four watercolours which seemed to depict the same group of people falling headlong into a succession of holes.

'I don't know a thing about art,' he said.

'No, of course not. You're a policeman. You just know what you like, and it's not Picasso or Pollock, right?'

'Even worse than that, I'm afraid. I've never heard of Pollock. Unless he's a fish.'

Vince Johnson, sprawling on his settee with a Glenmorangie in his hand – Miles had declined the offer, since it was only eleven-thirty in the morning – had no trouble recalling the night in Primrose Hill in March 1965.

'But first I must apologize for bringing you all the way out here. Not apologize exactly. It's necessary, you know. Never leave a trace. You've got to be careful; the modern state – into control, big time. CCTV's just the tip of the iceberg. Now I know it's useful for catching the bad guys, and anything which makes our job easier has to be good. But there's a dark side to it. What about us, the innocent citizen, never put a foot wrong, law-abiding, just going about our business? We're caught up in it all just

the same. All those cameras, recording of conversations – how do we know they're not intercepting our emails? The fact that there's a law against it only means that the likes of you and me get done for it. If you're MI5 or some other secret service we've never even heard of, you can do it with immunity and no one will ever know. So I never say anything important on the phone or by email. They might know you came here but they'll never know what we talked about. And it'll get worse before it gets better, believe you me. If it gets better. But you didn't come all this way to listen to my hobby-horse. What was it you wanted to know?'

'The incident in Cunningham Street, Primrose Hill. Way back: 2nd March 1965.'

'Yes, of course. I remember it because the child went missing.'

'The child? I thought it was the father.'

'Well, the father did go missing, as you've no doubt read in the report. But the child did too, for a time. Strange to think how we did things then. These days you'd have a woman PC, community liaison, all that bollocks; but in those days it was just the two of us – and I was a young PC who didn't know which way was up. Anyway, nobody realised at first that the boy had gone because everyone was concentrating on the mother, and she was concentrating on herself. Hysterical she was. All hell let loose. Mark Harris said if you asked him, she'd given as good as she got. Probably driven the poor bloke out of the house in the first place. Anyway, she reckoned he'd hit her, gone off his rocker, been throwing things. We got her calmed down and she was sat at the kitchen table for ages, just staring into space. Big posh house it was, couple of servants. Drawing room upstairs. I was so wet behind the ears in those days, I was surprised a rich geezer had got violent. Sure I can't tempt you?' he said, going to the sideboard to refill his whisky glass.

'No thanks, I'm driving. So what happened?'

'Well, after about half an hour, she – the mother – says, "Where's Peter?" – that was the name of the little lad. "Where's my Peter?" she kept saying. We searched high and low but he wasn't in the house. So then she starts screaming again, "My boy, my boy, he's taken my boy." Made a big impression on me, that woman screaming. Far more frightening than any con throwing his weight around. We all thought the father had made off with the boy. So we reported back to the station, got his details circulated. It was slower in those days than it is now. I was detailed to stay at the house. Longest two hours of my life, bar the times I was waiting in the hospital when Bindy was having the girls. But then he just comes waltzing into the kitchen.

The lad, I mean. “What are you doing in here, Mummy?” he says. “Where’s Mrs Seymour?” Cool as a cucumber, as if nothing had happened. We tried to find out where he’d been, but he wouldn’t say. Just ignored us, behaved as if nothing had happened.’

‘How old was he?’

‘About ten. Apart from all that, he seemed normal enough. But detached, somehow – mother was all over him, but he wasn’t having any of it. Shock, I suppose. These days he’d be sent to a shrink or whatever; but he was safe and well and we left it at that.’

‘Did you ever find out anything about the father?’

‘It’s a long time ago. It’s really just the boy I remember. And the kitchen, the mother screaming. She was dressed up, as if they’d been going to go out. Short skirt, high heels, loads of make up. Hair like a bees’ nest. They did it like that in the sixties. You’re too young to remember. I don’t think there’d been any previous reports of violence. But he never came back, did he? The father I mean.’

‘Listed as a missing person. Declared dead after seven years. Wife got the house.’

‘Makes you wonder what sort of man it is can walk out like that. I mean, you could leave a woman, no problem, especially if she makes your life a misery; but to walk out on your kid ... I couldn’t have done it.’

25.

The trial of Henri Jacques de Saint-Gilles, for High Treason
30th January 1813
V.

William Todd sworn, and examined by Mr Ludlow for the Crown.

Mr Ludlow:	You were sent on the 29th November last to apprehend the prisoner, were you not?
Todd:	I was.
Mr Ludlow:	Describe what took place that afternoon.
Todd:	We had been informed that the suspect would be found in the coffee-house on Green-street in Clapham.

Mr Ludlow: Turner's coffee-house?

Todd: That is correct. Turner's. We had been sent to apprehend one Henry de Saint-Gillies, a French émigré wanted for being a spy. I sent two of my men round the back of the shop, in case he had an intention to bolt; the four others entered with me from the front. But he came quietly.

Mr Ludlow: He offered no resistance?

Todd: None. There was a gentleman with him in the same booth who was most upset and looked as though he might offer some resistance, but the felon we took without bother.

Mr Ludlow: Mr Todd, look at the prisoner in the dock. Is this the man you apprehended as Henri de Saint-Gilles?

Todd: It is.

Mr Ludlow: Did he say anything upon that occasion?

Todd: Nothing at all. Not even in reply to his friend, who was shouting encouragement as we got him through the door. Not till we had him in the coach. Then he started up shouting and raving.

Mr Ludlow: You had also been sent to the prisoner's lodging, had you not?

Todd: We went there first. We had a warrant to search his rooms.

Mr Ludlow: And what did you find there?

Todd: Little which might incriminate him. There were a few letters in his writing desk; these we took as we had been instructed.

Mr Ludlow: But nothing else?

Todd: Nothing. We searched the garden too, in case he might have buried incriminating documents or other items there. But the housekeeper said the prisoner rarely went into the garden, and then only in her company.

Mr Ludlow: And you believed her?

Todd: She was a sober widow of middle-age. I believe she told the truth. There was besides no sign of recent digging in the garden.

William Todd cross-examined by Mr Ratcliffe.

Mr Ratcliffe: Mr Todd, you have said that Mons. de Saint-Gilles, although he did not resist arrest, and in fact said nothing during the said arrest, later gave himself over to 'shouting and raving' in the coach to Newgate. Is that correct?

Todd: It is.

Mr Ratcliffe: Do you remember the details of his shouting and raving?

Todd: I will never forget it; it was never-ending. It's a long drive from Clapham to Newgate. He kept shouting out the name Richard Turnbull. He was talking mostly in French, shouting the words 'bougre' and 'foutre'; then he said in English that this Richard Turnbull was a rake-hell, a scoundrel, a cogging rascal; and he added, 'He is the real traitor.' He was quiet for a bit just before we got to Newgate, but when he looked out of the window and saw the walls of the gaol, he sets up again. Then he said Turnbull ought to have been guillotined.

Mr Ratcliffe: Guillotined? You are sure that is the word he used?

Todd: Quite sure. He turned to me and said, with a sneer that I will never forget, 'That villain Turnbull. He ought to have been guillotined twenty years ago.'

Mr Ratcliffe: Have you any idea to what the prisoner was referring?

Todd: We gave it no thought. As I said, he was raving.

Mr Ratcliffe: And when you searched Mons. de Saint-Gilles's rooms, Mr Todd, can you remember what state they were in?

Todd: They were very neat and tidy, if that is what you mean. The landlady, who lived on the ground floor, said the prisoner insisted that the maid-servant went up every day to clean them.

26.

'Have you seen Marchmont lately?' asked Miles.

'Who? That box has got kitchen stuff in it; it wants to go in there.' She put down the box she had carried up three flights of stairs and stretched her arms. Aunt Tricia had flown back a week early and Julia had had to bring forward her moving date. Miles had helped her with the move, bringing his car and carrying box after box of her books down one set of stairs and up another.

'Peter Marchmont. That's the last box; we're done.'

'Thank God for that.' She pushed her fringe back from her forehead. 'My cafetière should be in one of these bags. If I can find it, I'll make some coffee. Then I

can clean out these cupboards and start unpacking. I don't know anyone called Peter Marchmont.'

'I wouldn't say no to a coffee; I'm gasping. I thought you knew him.'

She looked up from her rummaging. He was standing at the entrance to the kitchen, one arm on the door frame, staring down at her.

'The guy with the café.'

'What café? What are you talking about, Miles?'

'The Blue Teapot. Clapham Old Town. Past the tube station, behind Starbuck's. Owned by Peter Marchmont.'

'I never go to Clapham.'

'I didn't say you did. But you know who I mean, don't you?'

'No, I don't. What the hell are you talking about? I told you: I don't know anyone called Peter Marchmont. Or, for that matter, anyone who owns a café. In Clapham or wherever. Here it is. And the coffee. But I've got no milk.'

'I'll go to the shop and get some. What about sugar?'

'I must have left it behind. You'll have to get that too, if you want it.'

When he had left, slamming the door a fraction behind him, Julia stood with her back to the living-room window, half-sitting on the old three-column radiator, and closed her eyes. She felt light-headed; she hadn't finished packing till two in the morning and Miles had arrived at eight. She saw an image of the old flat; the rays of the afternoon sun falling obliquely on the pale wood floor, the cool cream bed-linen. All that was a memory now, as if it had never existed. This place felt small and constricted; the disassembled furniture and scattered boxes gave it a provisional appearance which she found disconcerting.

'I got biscuits too,' said Miles when he burst through the door twenty minutes later. 'Chocolate digestives. Give you some energy.' He banged them down on the work surface. 'And maybe aid your memory.'

'My memory's fine. It's yours which is playing tricks. Perhaps you're confusing me with one of your suspects. You certainly seem to be treating me like one.'

'Is there something you're not telling me, Julia?'

'Like what?' She measured out three dessertspoons of coffee into the pot. 'Like I'm having an affair with this guy behind your back?'

'I'm not saying you're having an affair.'

‘What, then? There’s lots I don’t tell you, Miles. In case you hadn’t noticed, we aren’t joined at the hip. But if I knew the man, I’d say so. I don’t, and that’s that. Now, can we drop the subject and just enjoy our coffee?’

‘If you say so.’ He stabbed open the packet of biscuits with a knife and ate in silence, staring into his mug. Julia finished her coffee and fetched a mop and a bucket. ‘I’ll give this floor the once-over before I start unpacking.’

‘You’re not much like your vagrant guy are you?’

‘Richard Turnbull? Not in that way. I could fancy the bohemian lifestyle – the absence of bills anyway – but I couldn’t cope with the mess.’

‘It’s gone eleven-thirty. I’ve got to get to work.’ He gave her a light kiss on the cheek. She watched, frowning, as he made his way slowly down the stairs. Half-way down he started to recite, very clearly, so she could hear, ‘Yesterday upon the stair, I met a man who wasn't there. He wasn't there again today, Oh how I wish he'd go away.’ He didn’t look up; she heard the front door of the house bang behind him.

At seven that evening, she gave up on the unpacking, picked up her bag from the unmade bed, left the house and wandered down the street. It was drizzling; puddles of water on the pavements reflected the orange light from the street lamps. At the main road she turned right towards the Indian restaurant, where she bought a takeaway rogan josh and a garlic naan bread. Walking back, she breathed in the mingled smells: the curry warm in its foil tray, the wet street and petrol fumes. The rushing insistence of Saturday night. It was on an evening like this that she had first walked to Greenwich to meet John Selby; how long ago that seemed. At the edge of her mind she was aware of hovering anxieties, but she pushed them away. Sitting on her sofa, she ate the curry very fast, mopping up the sauce with the bread. She hadn’t eaten since breakfast. Then she swiftly showered and sat in her pyjamas with a glass of wine.

What had Miles been talking about? He’d thrown her off-balance. He seemed to think she’d lied to him, as if it mattered a great deal that she knew this person, this Peter Marchmont who owned a café in Clapham. What did he say it was called? The Little Teapot? The Blue Teapot. Once her internet connection was up, she’d google it. If she could find some time, she might even go and take a look, see what this Marchmont looked like. What was Miles’s problem? He’d had a look about him, obstinate and inflexible, a long hard stare which she felt was meant to intimidate her.

But you can't intimidate out of someone information which doesn't exist. She sighed and stretched out on the settee. With the curtains closed, the room looked cosier. She could buy a lamp or two, soften the light a bit. Tomorrow she'd reassemble her desk and organize her work. It was worrying that Miles was taking such a proprietary interest in her life. But, come to think of it, the name 'Marchmont' did seem vaguely familiar. Had she come across it somewhere? Probably in something she'd read; it was an eighteenth-century sort of name. She poured another glass of wine and went to make the bed.

She dreamt a confused sequence of scenes in which Richard Turnbull and Henri de Saint-Gilles lived together in an apartment on the quai Voltaire in Paris. Saint-Gilles took a kit fiddle from his pocket and started to play a jig. Somehow, Richard Turnbull plucked a cello from his. He sat on a small stool and played a sarabande, crashing his bow down on the strings, a jarring sound which jangled out the high notes of the fiddle. Saint-Gilles tried to play more forcefully. The walls of Julia's bedroom began to collapse, shuddering, crumbling down as if shaken by an earthquake.

By the next evening, she had installed her desk in a corner of the living room and transferred her books to the bookcase. When she sat beneath her plaster busts of Wittgenstein and Newton, her back to the room, she felt zeroed, like a compass. Such a drain on her time. A memory of the Château Ruffec flickered across her mind; its sumptuous elegance, the comtesse typing on her ancient typewriter, Mathias Fournier lounging on the orchard bench. New Cross seemed grey and dirty after the peaceful sunshine of Ruffec. She had shifted worlds. But there was work to be done.

It was perhaps to avoid this sort of thing that Richard Turnbull had refused a normal life, had repudiated the responsibilities of home and family, servants and furniture. He'd seized pleasures and necessities on the hoof, as they turned up. In many ways, he'd left his life to chance, wandering here and there, knocking on doors for a night's sleep or a meal, making do with a few scraps in the open air if his efforts were unsuccessful. But was that very randomness a front for another life?

At last she was able to unpack the box which held the Turnbull documents, pick up the threads of her work again. She'd been studying parts of the journal she'd taken from Bank House, about a third of which was in English. She'd read it through once, but the accounts lacked coherence and she wasn't sure she hadn't missed

significant details in those closely-written pages. They contained a few snippets about Turnbull's past and his political beliefs – he seemed to have lived up, at least in theory, to the charge of Jacobin – but the bulk of what he'd written, though interesting, seemed to shed no light on his actions between 1810 and 1813. Not surprising, really; if he was up to something shady – spying or otherwise – he was hardly going to itemise it all in his journal.

The first passage recounted a trip to Manchester:

February 4th, 1812

I left Bristol at the first opportunity and travelled to Manchester by the mail coach. I should have preferred to walk, but haste had a priority and the mail rattles along at a couple of leagues an hour. Since it did not rain, I took the roof, preferring to look at the scenery – even the infernal regions of Birmingham – than be cooped up with the other passengers. The odour of human life seems to increase with each stage of a long journey and like the conversation, which is often mediocre, grates on one after a few hours. My fellow roof-companion was an Anglican clergyman immersed in his Bible until it was too dark to read. We reached Manchester around midnight. A light drizzle accompanied us all the way into the city, which even during daylight and in fine weather is overcast, smoky and miserable. With the onset of darkness, my clergyman friend became fearful of robbers, and kept turning about this way and that, so violently at times, when startled by an unusual noise, that I feared he would fall from the coach. I attempted to reassure him by reminding him of the presence of the guard, whose blunderbuss and pistols would defend us against robbers; and that some of the passengers no doubt carried arms of their own; to which he replied only that 'they who live by the sword shall die by it'. I left him to his scriptural ruminations, glad that I had not mentioned my own pistol. But when I called for supper at the Bridgewater Arms, I took pity on him and invited him to dine with me. We partook of a tolerable mutton pie, though the wine was execrable and not worth a half of what I paid for it. Our conversation turned to commerce, the king of this place. Although Manchester is the town of my birth, it ceases not to inspire in me a sense of giddy horror. Even in the darkness of the night, as the coach sped through the city, I had been able to make out the dark, tall houses, street upon street of them, the pattern broken only by squat manufactories which belch forth their acrid smoke like the constant belching of an invalid. For though the magnates of Manchester, and of countless other manufacturing towns in this poor country, will say that commerce strengthens a nation and makes it rich, one has only to look at the poor wretches by whom this strength and wealth are

derived, to see that it also makes a nation sick. My clergyman commented with the customary mystical common-places that the poor were blessed because they would receive their reward in heaven. – And the rich too? I asked. He smiled, revealing a couple of rotten teeth, and said, that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. I presume, in that case, I said, that you have informed your moneyed parishioners of the dire spiritual state in which they find themselves? Should you not also, perhaps, inform the King? But he would not be drawn. I felt inclined to quarrel with him over it; for I disliked his smug certainties – All men of the cloth vex me; it is a cloth stained with the filth of Ezekiel Enwright. But I forced down my anger; it would have been unwise to have thus drawn attention to myself.

The next day I paid a call on Mr A. The news he had to tell me was both depressing and encouraging: many new members, though few are willing to declare their allegiance, for fear of reprisals. He told me of three in Ancoats who had had a leg broken; they claimed it was by thugs, but it is common knowledge that it was their masters who were responsible for it. These trouble-makers though, are considered by some as heroes; for they dared to speak, before they were silenced, in favour of what many consider to be justice: a shorter working day; provision for sickness and old age. But it is not just the odds which are against them, but the whole might of established power and tradition, and what can move against that? It is for that, perhaps, that some work for a more direct outcome, standing shoulder-to-shoulder with those not inconsiderable groups of artisans who seek to recover justice for their trades: the partisans of General Ludd.

Was Richard Turnbull mixed up in the Luddite disturbances? Impossible to say. Julia couldn't even be sure from this account which side he sympathized with. She turned back to the journal. A significant proportion of the entries were autobiographical; though written during the summer of 1812, while Turnbull was in the early stages of his investigation into the French spy, they dealt with episodes in his life which had taken place long before.

After the death of my mother – a circumstance I still fear to bring under the scrutiny of my pen – my father sank into a state of grief characterised by the extremes of utter lethargy and furious activity. Each day he rushed from magistrate to barrister, from influential acquaintance to local gentry – all in an effort to bring about the closure of the chapel which had been the cause of our woe – and when there were no more visits

to be made, he sat by the fire in his study and brooded in silence, a glass of brandy at his elbow. He would sit thus for hours, oblivious to everyone. His silence during these periods was alarming, but less so than his speech; for during these times he would intermittently talk to my mother as if she stood before him. He was not a man who believed in spirits or aethereal forms – he was an unqualified Materialist – and yet, for approximately eight months, he drew solace only from these nightly conversations with my dead mother. At the end of that period the chapel was closed – less from his efforts than from certain heinous misdemeanours having taken place there; but my father took it as a victory. By that time, however, he had neglected his business so thoroughly that only debts remained, along with his many creditors who were demanding payment. It was then that he sold up; after paying off his creditors and dismissing the servants, he took a tiny house in Cheshire, in which we lived with one maidservant and his library of books. He could no longer remain in that place of her seduction.

This change in my life, at the age of fourteen, affected me profoundly. In that remote tall stone house I lived a paradisal existence overshadowed only by the loss of my mother. The back of the house looked on to a towering ridge dappled by light in the morning and menacingly dark when the sun shifted across the sky in the afternoon or evening. I could step out of our front door and be soon amongst the hills, and it was there that I discovered the propensity for walking which has been a defining feature of my life ever since – the joy of being alone in a vast landscape indifferent to human life, unchanging from one century to the next.

My father taught me himself, not having the money for either school or tutor – but my lessons lasted only from eight until twelve each morning; for the rest of the day I studied alone, which is to say I took my books out into the fields and thought and read as I walked or as I lay under a tree gazing up at the infinite blue sky sifted through its leaves. When the weather was too bad for prolonged walks, I returned for dinner at three and spent the rest of the evening with my father in his study, or took a candle to my attic room in which I had squeezed an old oak arm-chair between bed and wall and in which I sat reading or puzzling over the mathematical problems my father had set me for the next day.

I would like to say that with my mother's death we were brought closer to each other, but it was not the case. Although he was ever kind to me, my father never recovered from the shock of that event or the manner of its occurrence – and we were of too similar a bent, both too contained within ourselves, even to share an ache each knew the other felt. But we rubbed through the years amicably enough; the small income left him was sufficient to provide us with a frugal existence and that satisfied

us. Our only bone of contention was, in later years, my disinclination to what he called useful employment. Though I had responded with diligence, and even passion, to my studies, I considered these to be an end in themselves and not a stepping-stone to the life of tedium and ennui which I saw in a trade or a profession. We had many a lively dispute on the matter until finally, in an attempt to entice me into commerce – the path he himself had taken – he sent me to London, to work in the manufactory of an old friend.

That stay in London set the course of my whole life – though not in the way my father had envisaged. Mr Hanbury, at my father's request, put me through several of the stages of work in the manufactory, but it was a labour dull beyond imagination, which sucked the life from me. It was as if the manufactory were some mechanical monster crouching in Catherine-street; a monster which fed on the spirits and the vitality of those who worked in that low, murky building. At first, an utter exhaustion overcame me. I ceased to be a rational being; my only thought was of the midday-meal, then of the bell which signalled the end of my hours of servitude. It occurred to me for the first time to wonder why man is, as Dean Swift has it, a *homo rationis capax,* a being with a capacity for intellect, if he is to be reduced to a few menial actions repeated ad infinitum day after day. What need then for aspirations and feelings, intelligence and imagination? I had twice read my father's copy of Rousseau's *Du Contrat Social* and saw in the hell of Catherine-street nothing but men enslaved and in chains. And for what was all this toil, this subjection to the clock and the bell, the harsh commands of the Foreman, Mr Gerrard? At the end of the week they queued for a wage hardly adequate to keep body and soul together.

But, though my father had taught me a love of all men, Mr H's workers at first shocked me. For the most part foul-tongued and foul-minded, coarse of gesture, given to fights, with nothing in their heads but thoughts of food and drink and women, they were so different from me that they might have been another species. Though any fool could see that this dissimilarity between us was a result only of the differing conditions under which we had lived, yet they repelled, even disgusted, me. This was a puzzling dissimilarity: as at ease in their shabby clothes and their daily routine, as if they had been lords in a castle, they possessed a solidity which eluded me. I wondered then, that I should feel less substantial than they, but I have since understood this to be a fundamental of my nature. I am most at ease with myself when playing a part; the exercise of a rôle has somehow always kept me in equilibrium.

I had been reluctant to acknowledge myself as Mr Hanbury's protégé – perhaps I shrank from owning my privileged position – and Mr H thought this might be for the

best; some of the men, he said, being rough types. I thus presented myself as a young man of good family fallen on hard times – a fiction which explained the smoothness of my hands as well as my manner of speech.

In those first few weeks I tried – and for the most part succeeded – to work as they did; though it was heavy toil and my hands were raw, my back ached with the strain. I perhaps had some notion that this intense activity of body might lessen the fury within me. What was it? A lingering grief still at the loss of my mother? Or something deeper, more elemental? A stubborn refusal to accept what was given, an attempt – to do what? When the men left the manufactory at the end of each day, a tumultuous crowd which crossed the yard and emptied itself into the street as if driven by a single mind, I often wondered what it might be like to walk in the opposite direction, pushing against that crowd.

She jumped at the harsh sound of the doorbell. A group of five young men and women huddled together on the narrow landing, holding two bottles of wine and a large bag of crisps.

‘We’ve just come to say “hi”. We live downstairs. I’m Marcus.’

‘Sam.’

‘Katrina.’

‘Sarah.’

‘And I’m Tom.’

She invited them in, fetched glasses from a box in the kitchen. The evening before, getting ready for bed, she’d heard them going out at ten o’clock in a flurry of banging doors, muffled shrieks and giggles.

‘What a lot of books,’ said Tom. ‘You seem to have settled in very quickly.’

‘I’ve got a few boxes left to unpack. It’s still a bit bare, though. And I’ve not got my internet or email sorted out.’

‘You can hack in to one of the local networks. That’s what we did.’

‘You need some nice fabrics,’ said Katrina. ‘Thick curtains, a few cushions. A coffee table, perhaps.’

‘I suppose you’re right, but I just can’t summon up the energy. I’m hopeless at that sort of thing.’

‘I can do it for you, if you like; I’ve got to find another two projects for my interior design assessment. As long as you don’t mind me taking photos. And you’d have to write a statement for me.’

‘That’s no problem. But money might be.’

‘We can get stuff cheap from markets and second-hand shops. I know where to go.’

‘It’s a deal, then.’

‘Have you got something to put these crisps in?’ said Sarah.

It was while she was searching for a bowl that Julia realized where she’d seen the name Marchmont before. The email in the kitchen at Bank House. She’d gone to look for paper and it was there on the work surface. She was sure it was the same name. Marchmont was the collector who’d offered such a ridiculous sum of money for Dot Kenton’s Turnbull documents. Must be loaded. Had he put his first name on the email? She couldn’t remember.

She was only half-listening to what the others were saying. ‘Are you new to New Cross?’ Sarah was asking. ‘I’m sure I’ve seen you before.’

‘I’ve only moved round the corner. You’ve probably seen me in the college library.’

‘What are you doing?’

‘I’m a history postgrad.’

‘That’s useful,’ said Marcus. ‘I’m doing history too. I can come to you if I need help.’

‘You’re not all historians, are you?’

‘No, just me.’

‘Well, that’s a relief.’

Thankfully, it took them no time at all to polish off the wine, after which they went away again and Julia returned to her desk. Miles was convinced she knew Peter Marchmont. And now it turned out that Marchmont had more than a passing interest in Richard Turnbull. It was too much of a coincidence. She looked at her watch. Six-thirty, Sunday afternoon: the Blue Teapot would be closed by now. She’d check it out on the internet at the Academy tomorrow and call in after work. In the meantime, she’d finish Turnbull’s account of his time at Mr Hanbury’s factory.

> After some weeks one of the men – a scraggy, gentle man of middling age whose name was Thomas – invited me to a meeting that night at the Ship tavern in Cross-street. I had thought this to be a mere occasion for drinking and conversation, but I was mistaken. These men whom I had thought so worn down and conscious only of

their daily toil, showed another side to themselves that Tuesday night. Those who met comprised a very small fraction of Mr H's men, yet there were others, from other factories – and a couple of artisans – a clockmaker, a hairdresser. The discussion was not of the frivolous things I had expected, of women or the cock-pit, but of parliamentary reform, the enfranchisement of every man of sound mind, of a new world in which all should be free. – If it can happen in France, said an old man, it can happen here. (I can smell even now the tobacco in his clay pipe, which gave off a damp, choking, yellowish smoke. It is a smell I have always since associated with the fleeting possibility of freedom.)

The mention of France caused a great stir and animation, and a toast was proposed to the Revolution – although it was made quietly enough, so as not to alarm the publican – 'Otherwise we will be out on our ears again and having to find another meeting place.' It was then proposed that the group form itself into a society, with the aim of discussing and promoting parliamentary reform. — For why should it be only gentlemen who have the right to vote? said one. Because they sit on their arses all day and have the time to think about it? Hang the lot of them.

— No, said the old man with the pipe; it's reform we want, fair and square, not bloodshed.

— But those that hold the strings shape the law to their own ends.

— Michael's right, said a young man of my own age; the law is putrid. It exists to repress those like us – to keep us in our place, unquestioning and obedient. Richard, speak: what is your opinion on these matters?

— Be careful, said someone from the corner. He might be a spy.

— I am no spy, I said, turning to the man who had spoken, who looked for all the world like a barrel perched on a stool, two short fat legs protruding out from under a round, fat belly.

— He may not be a government spy, said Michael. But you will not deny, he said, turning to me with a malevolent look, that you have been placed among us by Hanbury or Gerrard, to see what we are up to?

— I swear that is not true, I said. I was unsure how to answer them; reluctant to own to the truth, disappointed that they had seen through me. I agree with Michael, I said. I believe the law on many points to be corrupt. It must be changed. But how can it be changed if those who make it have a vested interest in keeping things as they are? We must defy the law if necessary, and its fat and indolent keepers. Without being aware of it, I had risen to my feet as I gave this passionate speech. You are all no doubt aware, that merely by expressing these ideas you, and I too, run the risk of an accusation of treason. But what is treason? Is it treason to wish to purify our country

of injustice? To bring equality and liberty? Is it treason to want every man and woman, every child, to have enough to eat? Where is the justice in a land in which one man cannot live on ten thousand a year and another – merely by accident of birth – is forced to spin out a living on a few pence a week? There was general applause at my speech; but someone said, Yes, but it is treason nonetheless to question that.

— It is treason only because the rightful order of things is inverted, I said. It is a treason of sorts not to speak out against such injustices. Those who wish to keep things as they are – those who stand to lose by reform – they are the traitors to England. A man can be hanged for stealing a sheep to feed his starving family, but the land itself has been stolen from its people.

— Fine words, Richard, said Thomas. But be careful where you speak them. And who you speak them to. It is not truth the magistrates want, but gallows fodder.

— Before they hang me, I said; they will have to catch me. And even the cruellest hanging magistrate cannot convict without some shred of evidence. Who here would betray me?

— I would offer you some words of advice, Richard, said Michael. In these times, which you have accurately described – whether you are sincere or not, I cannot tell – there are few you can trust. Any one of those here tonight may be what you would call a traitor – a nark sent here by the government or by Hanbury. And there are many besides who will give false testimony for a fee. This is not a game. In the end, any one of us might pay with his life for his beliefs.

He was right, of course, though I took little notice of his warning. In the decade that followed, Michael himself was imprisoned on more than one occasion, often without charge.[6] His last sentence did for him; he died two days after his release from Coldbath Fields in October 1805, while London exulted at the news of Trafalgar. (I pass over my own imprisonments, which have been few; a result, perhaps, of that ability to elude capture which I had boasted of.)

They decided that night to form a society, on the lines of the Corresponding Society, but with a halfpenny subscription instead of a penny, to discuss and debate matters of interest – parliamentary reform, universal suffrage, the education of the people – and to read aloud from the *Rights of Man* and other books.

My mind was in such turmoil from the meeting – and my own part in it – my speech had come as if from another's mouth, expounding ideas I knew I held, but with

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[6] In response to the perceived threat of social unrest in the wake of the French Revolution, habeas corpus was suspended between May 1794 and July 1795 and again from April 1798 to March 1801, allowing suspects to be detained indefinitely without charge. JD.

a conviction and an articulacy which surprised me – that I did not return straight to Mr H's, but wandered about the streets a while, my head spinning. Above the tall rooftops I made out the constellation Leo and the head of the serpent beneath the foot of Hercules. Bright Regulus and Arcturus shone down that night like a blessing on my eager head. There were enough ordinary men of good faith, I thought, who together were as strong as a Hercules and would succeed – within the decade – in cleansing the Augean stables of England's affairs. But I might have pondered that there was a serpent – always a serpent, in one form or another; London or Paris, town or country – to thwart even the best-intentioned and strongest-willed.

I strolled back to Mr Hanbury's full of elation; but, as I turned the corner of Catherine-street I saw – under cover of a doorway opposite – a man I could not but recognise, though he was covered by a large cloak and a round hat. – I had sharp eyes in those days. – A barrel on legs: it was he who had accused me during the meeting of being a spy. His companion: none other than Gerrard, with whom he was deep in conversation. I kept well back, tried to edge closer in the hope of overhearing what they said; but as I drew near, I heard Gerrard say, Thank you, Daniels; they parted, and I heard the chink of money changing hands.

I understood, without having heard any of their conversation, that Daniels had given to Gerrard an account of the meeting, and I was young enough and naïve enough to be affronted at his double dealing. Hidden in the doorway, I remained brooding on this, when I realised, that Gerrard would no doubt relay the content of Daniels's intelligence to Mr Hanbury, who would thus become acquainted with my part in the meeting. While I cared little that he should know, I had rather he find out from me than from Gerrard. Therefore, on entering the house, I begged permission to speak to Mr H on a matter of urgency and proceeded to tell him all that had passed that evening, including the fact that one of the men had been snitching to Gerrard.

He smiled at this. – Gerrard is my eyes and ears amongst the men, he said – some of whom, Richard, are scoundrels who would not think twice about slitting your throat for that waistcoat of yours. That Gerrard employs some of their own number to inform on the others is no bad thing; it is easier to arrive at accurate information that way. I see from the look upon your face that you are both surprised and horrified. Sit down and we will chat. – He poured a glass of port wine for each of us and sat once more behind his desk.

— The manufactory is like the kingdom, Richard, he said, and in it I am king. A kindly and benevolent monarch, like our blessed George; but the smooth running of the manufactory, as that of the State, necessitates a firm hand. There are dangers. Some of my subjects are volatile; they want to upturn our little kingdom overnight,

seeing their petty injustices as important matters of state. Where would we be then? Were I forced out of business, both they and I would be destitute. Like his majesty, I am protector as well as master. It is for that reason that I send Gerrard to spy on them, and for that reason that Daniels snitches.

Though I respected Mr H. for his kindness, his ideas were distasteful to me. I took a swig of wine and told him about my speech, adding that it had been sincere. He shook his head sadly and said, You are too like your father for your own good, Richard. He too was a firebrand in his youth, full of unnatural ideas. Continue in that vein and you will be ensnared by the radicals, and then fall foul of the law. – I was about to exclaim that it was the inequalities of the law which made radical reform necessary, but he held up his hand and went on. Richard, while you remain under my roof, I have a responsibility towards you, and to your father. Now, I want you to promise me that you will not join this half-baked society that my men have got into their heads to form. It may well be harmless, as you say, but I doubt it. There are hotheads amongst them, who will want to inflame all the others, and who will not stop until they have reduced to ashes the fabric of the world as we know it. And I do not want you to be involved with such men – unless of course you have it in mind to act as a nark for me? But no, that would not do. They do not trust you enough. They already suspect you have been put there to spy on them.

27.

Sunday afternoon, five o'clock. Peter Marchmont, hands in the pockets of his Polartec jacket, strides out over Clapham Common. Every Sunday afternoon after the Blue Teapot closes, he takes a walk; Clapham South tube station and back. Summer and winter, rain or shine. An hour or two of fresh air. On this particular afternoon in mid-October he sniffs as he walks, relishing the fusty smells of autumn; leaves starting to decay, dark soft mud, a damp chill. This is the time of year he enjoys most, when the afternoons close in early with protective darkness and memories come to him of crumpets toasted on the kitchen fire, butter melting into the holes on the crisp dark surface. He likes to walk at dusk, as the setting sun dips below the horizon. What was it one of his customers had told him? That the rotation speed of the earth at this latitude is getting on for six hundred miles an hour. So this stationary

bit of Clapham Common is whizzing along faster than a jet plane. Well, we can't always believe what our eyes tell us. Truth hides beneath the appearance of things.

He relaxes as darkness encroaches on the grass of the common. A surge of delight. As an adolescent he had walked and walked; in his pockets hunks of cheese taken from the kitchen and carefully wrapped in aluminium foil, Mars Bars and digestive biscuits. He had walked for hours: Primrose Hill, Regent's Park, Belsize Park, Kentish Town. Weekends, evenings, winter afternoons. It was as if he'd had to release the energy stored up in the long hours spent in his room, doing homework, reading – always reading; Mrs Seymour used to say, 'Peter, dear, you'll ruin those lovely eyes of yours with all that reading.' He borrowed as many books as he was allowed from the library; books on the French Revolution, on the history of the aristocracy in France, on miscarriages of justice. He was as obsessed with Henri de Saint-Gilles as the other boys at school were by footballers and pop stars.

Hearing the urgent wail of a siren on the South Circular, he lifts his head. A police car weaving in and out of the traffic. He watches the rhythmic pulsation of its blue light, a tiny creature struggling against the glass, trying to break free. Every blue light is a reminder of that other one, long ago, and he is once more a boy of ten standing outside the old house in Cunningham Road.

It lit the hedge in rhythmic fits and starts; a momentary blue glow over the crinkled dark brown of the copper beech leaves. Light-dark. Blue-dark. As he stared at it, the world contracted to that tiny point of intermittent ghostly light; Peter Marchmont, ten years old, short trousers above grazed knees, and this flashing light on top of the polished bodywork of the black police car. A Jaguar, was it? Or a Wolseley? He couldn't be sure; so long ago, now. Then it stopped. The car doors had been flung open and down the path of number 68 had rushed two policemen; the older one, in plain clothes, had hammered on the door with his fist. His door; the door of the house which had until two hours ago been Peter Marchmont's paradise. A phantasmagoria of a paradise, perhaps; but one from which he had managed successfully to blot out the violence he occasionally witnessed and often heard, and the anguish which went with it. It had leapt out now, a Jack from a box which could never be closed again. The detective had a broken nose and his suit was crumpled over the hard muscles beneath it. The uniformed constable looked no older than Mark next door, Mark who allowed Peter into his bedroom to look at his specimens under the microscope and

with whom he played football or read comics under the weeping willow on summer afternoons. These two had violated his paradise. What had been a secret was now known by others, who would judge it by their rules, make it theirs.

He had only ever been able to remember one thing about his absence from the house that night. He knew he'd been gone long enough for everyone to be worried about him, but he couldn't remember walking away, or which direction he'd taken. His return he remembered clearly, though; the fierce and unexpected hug his mother gave him when he walked into the kitchen, the shrillness of her scream. Her smell, her blotched face, the saline damp of her weeping. How long had he been gone? Two hours? Four? She'd always been vague. Hours and hours you were missing, hours and hours. Gave me such a scare. She'd talked about the incident for months afterwards, but only in a jocular way which he'd hated. Gave us all such a fright. But thank heaven you turned up again. As if the disaster had been Peter's disappearance and not his father's. As if, when Peter walked through the door, everything had returned to normal, the chasm closed up again. But Peter knew there would be no more sailing his wooden boat on the pond with his father. His mother disgusted him. When she talked, it was like having the cheese grater rubbed over his skin.

The blue light disappears amongst the traffic on the High Street. What had become of his father? What had happened that night? He remembered raised voices, the sick thud of furniture – a chair or a table – being pushed over. But something else must have happened; it wasn't the usual violent row, the shoving and slapping from which one or other of his parents emerged the next morning with a bruise or a black eye. Mark had said the next day that Peter's father had 'gone berserk'. Peter had had to ask what 'berserk' meant, and Mark had talked about ancient warriors, wild Norse ancestors who had fought tooth and nail to protect what was theirs. Had he merely wanted to show off his knowledge, Peter wonders now, or had he been trying to put John Marchmont's behaviour in a better light? God knows. He hasn't seen Mark since the family moved to Welwyn Garden City in 1972.

He had known, young though he was, that what had happened that evening changed everything. His father had been his friend, his ally. They had walked together in the park, played cricket, done puzzles together. The sailing boat they floated on the pond had been made by John Marchmont, who had carved it from a piece of balsa wood, painstakingly fixing masts and fabric sails, rigging made of string. His mother had grumbled at the mess the shavings had made. After that night,

there had been only Mrs Seymour to protect him from her biting words, her slaps and shoves. Turning into the Windmill for a quick one, Peter feels on the backs of his legs the sudden sting of the bejewelled hand that would strike from nowhere, whenever he was least expecting it. He was always doing wrong, but could never understand why, and thus had difficulty learning to avoid those things which brought punishment. It was a world without logic.

He takes his pint of bitter and sits in the corner, unzips his jacket. He'd known he would never see his father again. Sitting in bed in the dark, listening for the remembered step on the path, the metallic ring of his shoes, he'd hoped for his father's return, but he knew the hope was vain. He knew because he'd seen the ghost. Not the ghost of his father, admittedly; but the two couldn't inhabit the same space. The one stood in for the other.

And it was during those lost hours that Saint-Gilles had first appeared to him. Though the rest was a blank, that episode replayed itself perfectly in his memory, like a film he'd watched over and over again. He'd found himself in Regent's Park Road, walking under leafless trees; had stopped to look through the railings at a man walking towards him across the grass. His first thought was that it might be his father. But the stranger, though of similar build, was shorter and was not wearing his father's weekday suit and grey wool overcoat. This was a man straight out of a history book. Peter knew that because he'd spent whole afternoons lying on his playroom floor leafing through *Costume through the Ages*, a large and delightful volume which he was allowed to borrow occasionally from his father's bookcase. The writing was difficult and uninteresting, but every fifty pages or so there was a magnificent folded page of full-colour illustrations. Men, women and children from every period. High and low, rich and poor, work clothes and holiday costumes. So it was that Peter had recognized the man on the other side of the railings as an inhabitant of the late eighteenth century. A dark tail coat, cut away at the front; white breeches and leather boots; a white chemise. And a white cravat decorated with thin stripes of red and blue. It was the stripes that held Peter's attention, making him gasp in fear. The stripes meant that the man was a French revolutionary, a Jacobin, someone to be afraid of. It was the Jacobins, his father had told him, who sent innocent people to the guillotine in their thousands. Some were saved by the Scarlet Pimpernel, but it was always a close-run thing and if you were caught it meant instant death. But Peter could not bring himself to run away; and when the man

reached the railing, he merely smiled and patted Peter on the head, ruffling his hair the way his father did. He seemed to increase in size, and Peter suddenly knew that everything would be all right. How long had he stood by those railings with the ghost? It could have been ten minutes or two hours. His next memory was of walking into the kitchen where his mother was sitting weeping at the table, the young police officer behind her.

His pint finished, Peter ambles back across the common to the Blue Teapot. He checks his watch. Six-thirty; an hour or so before Paulin is due. Time to eat.

Drue Paulin, sitting at Peter's dining table in front of a late high tea of ham sandwiches, scones and fruit cake, looked up and said, 'You know you're being watched, don't you?'

'What do you mean, I'm being watched?'

'That car down the road.'

'The red one? The Audi?'

'That's the one.'

'I've noticed it. But what makes you think it's someone watching me? Why would anyone want to watch me?'

'Blowed if I know. But I'd keep an eye on it if I was you. If it's the filth you'll have to be careful.'

Peter moved to the window and looked carefully out through the net curtains he had drawn across the window before Drue's arrival. The car was still there.

'There's no one in it. It's probably just someone visiting.'

'He's in the passenger seat. I saw the back of his head when I turned the corner.'

'Is that why you came to the back door?'

'Yep. Walked all the way round the block. In my line of business you develop a sixth sense. Can't be too careful.'

'Just make sure you are. Careful, that is. You assured me you weren't known to the police.'

'I'm not. Now, do you want to see what I've got for you?'

28.

The trial of Henri Jacques de Saint-Gilles, for High Treason

30th January 1813

VI.

Mr John Price was sworn and examined by Mr Solicitor-General for the Crown.

Mr Solicitor-General:	Who are you?
John Price:	A trader.
Mr Solicitor-General:	How long have you lived in England?
John Price:	Since the year 1802.
Mr Solicitor-General:	In what month did you first arrive in this country?
John Price:	September or October, I know not.
Mr Solicitor-General:	And where do you now reside?
John Price:	In Somers Town. Number 10, Upper Evesham Buildings.
Mr Solicitor-General:	What business have you in London?
John Price:	I trade in maps and prints. Sometimes in books and other items. I have a shop in Chandos-street.
Mr Solicitor-General:	Look carefully at the prisoner in the dock and tell me if you are acquainted with him.
John Price:	I am.
Mr Solicitor-General:	How long have you known him?
John Price:	About three years.
Mr Solicitor-General:	When exactly did you first meet him?
John Price:	I think it was in March or April of 1810.
Mr Solicitor-General:	And under what name did he introduce himself to you?
John Price:	I knew him as Monsieur Henri de Lessac.
Mr Fothergill:	Have you ever sold maps to this man?
John Price:	On occasion.
Mr Fothergill:	What sort of maps?
John Price:	Maps of the coast of England.
Mr Fothergill:	Maps that might be used by a French fleet seeking to invade these shores?
John Price:	Perhaps. But maps such as might be bought by any man in any shop such as mine.

Mr Solicitor-General: And where did Mons. de Lessac live?

John Price: At Litchfield-street, number 7.

Mr Solicitor-General: You have visited him there?

John Price: On occasion I have called at that house. At other times we met at the Queen's Head in Covent Garden.

Mr Solicitor-General: Did the prisoner have any other place of residence that you know?

John Price: I am unaware of any.

Mr Solicitor-General: And what other connection had you with Mons. de Lessac?

John Price: I procured intelligence for him regarding the English fleet.

Mr Solicitor-General: For what purpose?

John Price: To pass to the ministry of France.

Mr Solicitor-General: How do you know that it was his intention to pass intelligence to the French ministry?

John Price: He told me so.

Mr Solicitor-General: What kind of intelligence did he request of you?

John Price: Details of the fleet at Portsmouth and of the ships at the dockyard in Chatham; but also anything else that I could procure.

Mr Solicitor-General: Such as?

John Price: Such as the state of the coastal defences. I provided him with a plan of the redoubt at Eastbourne.

Mr Solicitor-General: And what regarding the fleet?

John Price: The number of ships and their types, the number of their guns, their readiness for war, when they would sail, under which commanders, where they were bound for, and so on.

Mr Solicitor-General: You procured this intelligence yourself?

John Price: Not I myself. I employed other men to find it for me.

Mr Solicitor-General: How many other men?

John Price: At first only one. Then two, sometimes three.

Mr Solicitor-General: Was Mons. de Lessac aware that you employed others in this enterprise?

John Price: At first, no.

Mr Solicitor-General: But later?

John Price: Yes.

Mr Solicitor-General: And what was the result of his finding out this fact?

John Price: He was displeased. We quarrelled.

Mr Solicitor-General: Was there anything other over which you quarrelled?

John Price: Over my payment.

Mr Solicitor-General: What terms had you made with him?

John Price: At first he paid me five guineas a month.

Mr Solicitor-General: He paid you a salary?

John Price: As long as I continued to bring him regular intelligence, which I did. I brought so much that he increased the amount to seven guineas.

Mr Solicitor-General: When was this?

John Price: After about seven months.

Mr Solicitor-General: Yet you subsequently quarrelled over this amount?

John Price: I had to pay those who procured the intelligence for me. I was left with very little.

Mr Solicitor-General: And Mons. de Lessac increased your payment?

John Price: At first he did, because I was bringing in such an amount of information. He gave me ten guineas. But when I asked again, he refused.

Mr Solicitor-General: Upon what grounds?

John Price: I had told him how I conducted the business. He was displeased with that; he said it was for him to employ men to gather information and that I had no business to do so. He accused me of running my own spy ring.

Mr Solicitor-General: And were you?

John Price: I was not.

Mr Solicitor-General: Was there any other reason he was displeased with you?

John Price: He said the intelligence I brought was of no use, that it was out of date, or that it merely repeated what I had procured earlier.

Mr Solicitor-General: How did you receive the information from your men?

John Price: They rode to London with it and delivered it to my shop in Chandos-street. The horses also I was obliged to pay for. Sometimes, however, my business took me to the coast and I carried it to London myself.

Mr Solicitor-General: And how was it conveyed to Mons. de Lessac?

John Price: I brought it to the house at Litchfield-street, sometimes to the Queen’s Head. Lately I passed it to one of his men at the chapel off Castle-street.

Mr Solicitor-General:	And when you went to the house in Litchfield-street, you put it into Mons. de Lessac's hand?
John Price:	On the occasions he was there.
Mr Solicitor-General:	And when he was not?
John Price:	Then I gave it to his assistant, Mons. LeConte.
Mr Solicitor-General:	How long were you thus employed by the prisoner?
John Price:	Nigh on two years, I cannot well remember.

29.

He steps through french windows and she is alone, staring at lace curtains which billow in the night breeze. Encumbered now by the long dress and unfamiliar shoes, she trips after him; but the balcony beyond the windows is empty.

How many times has she been here now, in this neo-classical room with its walls of pastel blue and green, its white reliefs depicting goddesses or Bacchantes? Three or four, perhaps. Each time the same, down to the last detail; a narrative she can neither refuse nor modify. It starts with the squeaking of her pumps on the parquet floor as she turns, one arm outstretched, to rejoin her partner. She cannot name the dance, though she seems to have learnt its steps well enough. A minuet, a chaconne, a passacaglia?

Alone of all the dancers – twenty or thirty, maybe – she and her partner wear close-fitting masks. Below the tight velvet – black as the hair he has gathered into a neat ribbon – she can see only the lower part of his face. A yearning fills her to reach out and touch his cheek, to feel its rough smoothness under her palm; but something holds her back. Too late, always too late. Glancing down at his black boots, she notes that they are flecked with mud; he ought to have polished them. Her white-gloved hand rests on his a moment, before she turns away in an elaborate arc reflected in the tall mirrors on both sides of the room.

The musicians, five bewigged men in brown breeches and coats, glance knowingly at each other. Their instruments – viola d'amore, wooden flute, chalumeau, viola da gamba and harpsichord – play a dance, but it is also a language unfathomable which hints at something just beyond her grasp. It infiltrates her mind, a knowing voice on the edge of her perception.

She finds herself suddenly alone with the partner who gazes so sternly at her, his eyes disdainful through the holes in his mask. She stretches out her hand but he is just out of reach; an aching panic slashes through her, a sense of something lost, in time and eternity. His cravat, she notices for the first time, is edged in red and blue. The music starts up again, slow and stately, a dark bass line on the viola da gamba. Somehow she knows it is a sarabande; the word pulsates in her mind. At arm's length they move down the room in a complex pattern of lines parallel and perpendicular, turning in sweeping arcs; a confusion of progression and retrogression momentarily captured in the mirrors; a reflection which bounces back and forth, to infinity.

Then the music stops and she is enveloped in silence. Her partner bows in an exaggerated parody, his left hand held out. 'I have a fine eye for accuracy,' she hears herself say; 'I delight in precision.' But as he raises his head from the bow he removes his mask, and his face is now a mass of putrefaction, the shadowed cheek an expanse of sores which creep along chin and neck.

He steps through french windows and she is alone, staring at lace curtains which billow in the night breeze. Encumbered now by the long dress and unfamiliar shoes, she trips after him; but the balcony beyond the windows is empty and she looks down, not on the formal English garden she had expected, but on a lurid slum of filth and smoke.

Always at that point she wakes, startled and confused, the dream pounding in her memory like the aftershock of a blow.

Lying in the semi-darkness, she checked the time on her phone. Five o'clock. The dream brought to mind a sentence written by Richard Turnbull: 'A sadness unconquerable wells up in me.' In the hour before she left for the Academy, Julia reread the document which contained that sentence. Three sheets of loose paper had been sewn into Richard's journal with a piece of blue thread; whether by Turnbull himself or by a later reader, it was impossible to say. They contained a hotchpotch of jottings and notes.

Born at Manchester 1774, two years before the American Revolution.

A sadness unconquerable wells up in me, flows out through my pen like blood from a wound. Life is a battle, into which we are sent like the common soldier with no say in

the business, by generals who lack both concern for our welfare and influence over the course of events. Since my youth I have been determined to live free. Vivre libre ou mourir – live free or die. Yet these words sound to me now like the posturing of a braggart child. Can I say that I have truly lived free?

My life: a piece of music in a minor key. Unutterable pathos. Nearing fifty years of age, in this year of dubious grace 1822. So many dead. Friends, lovers, companions. My poor Raoul, who died, a few months after his mother, a boy of fourteen. The son of whom I had been oblivious until S-G, that afternoon of fury, blurted out at the same moment the fact of his existence and that of his death.

And what have I achieved, save a slight broadening of girth and coarsening of features? A loss of hope, a knowledge that what I strived for will not be achieved in my lifetime. Will it ever? Will not the spurious divisions of rich and poor stretch ineradicable into the future?

I have trampled friends underfoot, dealt roughly with those who sought to love me. Less, I might add in my defence, deliberately to wound or to harm, than from a natural rough truculence which has always been present in my Nature – a terrible fear of being held back, a need to push ahead, to break the power of every bond, real or potential. It is for that, perhaps, that I am incapable of that steady and settled life which is the ambition of almost every other being on the earth.

Yet S— used to say, that to serve another, whom one loves above oneself, is not bondage but freedom. Had she lived – how different would my life have been! Or would I have spurned her too, in time?

But life is a sad trajectory from innocence and ignorance to knowledge and guilt. Perhaps it may not be otherwise. Despite early dreams, my life has been inglorious. (Dark and criminal to some.) Yet I have ever striven towards an enlightened state, to remain loyal to the principles of reason, truth, and progress.

‘High treason,’ says Dr Johnson – I still possess, tucked away in Montagu’s study where he has kept them for me all these years, the volumes of Johnson’s magnificent Dictionary left to me by my father – one of the few possessions of his that I kept. Even his books I sold – not because I did not treasure them – I have always derived the most intense pleasure from reading; it is the only pleasure which does not fade with use and time – but possessions of any kind, like the bolt on the door of a cell, imprison one. I gave such of them as would be found acceptable to Tom and Elizabeth Fitzroy; his more radical works I distributed to others of my acquaintance in Manchester.

‘High treason,’ then, says Dr Johnson, ‘is an offence against the security of the commonwealth, or of the King’s majesty, whether by imagination, word, or deed.’ And there we have it: ‘whether by imagination, word or deed’. An unholy trinity.

Yet a traitor in London on the 4th of March 1793 became a loyal subject the next day in Paris after a channel crossing of some six hours. The same man. A different commonwealth.

Elsewhere Johnson has it that the commonwealth is ‘the publick; the general body of the people’; and it does not take a man of exceptional intelligence to imagine – even to recall from recent memory – circumstances in which the security of the King is contrary to that of the people. The murdering sabres of Peterloo: a form of treason.

Is Hamlet a traitor because he imagines the death of a king, or an instrument of justice because he contrives the death of a traitor?

The sun sets behind the hill in a radiance of pink and orange, showy but magnificent, below a sky of pure frosty blue.

My life sinks – I feel it – but not in a glorious play of colours; and not to rise again tomorrow.

Poverty and degradation still most men’s lots – here and in France. Slavery of one sort or another.

Upon the stage, a man may be a king or a beggar – the same man distinguished only by the costume he wears and the speech he utters. Thus are we all kings or beggars, by our trappings.

The beggar knows this; the king does not.

There were some further paragraphs, but they were heavily crossed out and illegible.

30.

Miles watched as Peter Marchmont ushered out the last of his customers. Four-ten; must close early on Sundays. Ten minutes later the outer gate swung shut. At four-fifty Marchmont left the building by his private front door. Miles watched him walk to the end of the street, then got out of his car and went after him. Down Orlando Road to the Common. Up and down the intersecting paths. A few minutes staring at the pond, then he doubled back on himself, hands in pockets. Just taking a walk, then. He raised his head at the wailing siren of a squad car on the South Side. The sun was going down and it was chilly; Miles was glad when he saw the fat man go through the doors of the Windmill pub. Not many sitting out today. He followed him in, bought a bottle of Bitburger and found a seat not far from the door, pretending to read the *Mail*. Marchmont sat on his own, apparently deep in thought, with a pint of bitter and a strange, far-away look. Strange guy all round if you ask me.

Half an hour later Marchmont drained his glass and ambled back to the Blue Teapot. Whatever he was up to, it took place behind closed doors. This guy's life was as exciting as watching paint dry: hardly went out; no visitors to speak of, just clients and tradesmen. And, come to think of it, that black guy who'd arrived one evening after the café had closed. Couple of months ago. Expensive grey overcoat, attaché case. Miles had waited an hour and a half for him to come out again, but got little more than a passing glimpse of his face as he strode down the street, the heels of his polished shoes clacking on the damp pavement.

The lights on the first floor came on. What was he doing up there? Eating, probably, or watching TV. Did he cook his own tea, or eat leftovers from the café? Julia had lied; she'd told him she didn't know Marchmont. That had taken him aback; he hadn't thought she was the deceitful type. Which meant that whatever was going on between them, it wasn't good. Not an affair, he was certain of that. But in a way, the calm exchange of documents he'd observed was more worrying than an affair. What had she got herself mixed up in? Was it just obsession for her research, or was there something else, something she wasn't telling him? No one could be that passionate about research, surely? It wasn't normal. There had to be something else.

But he'd got nothing on the fat man. A violent father who went AWOL when Marchmont was a kid. Mother possibly hysterical who'd died several years back. A

short marriage, a divorce. Obviously couldn't hack it in the relationship department, but no surprises there.

Miles had traced the house in Hackney where Marchmont had lived during the two years of his marriage. The old woman who'd been their neighbour was still there. 'Lived here all my life, love. Wouldn't go anywhere else,' she'd told him. According to her, they were nice, normal people; kept themselves to themselves a bit, but always pleasant. No children. Did a lot of work on the house. Yes, I heard them arguing from time to time but we all do it, don't we? If we've got someone to argue with. I even fall out with my Alice – that's my cat, in case you're wondering. Pity about them splitting up. She used to come in for a cup of tea now and again. Nice girl. Wanted a baby, but they were having difficulties. I said they should adopt. Sandra, she was called. No, Stephanie, I think. That's it: Stephanie.'

The woman who had been Mrs Stephanie Marchmont was now Ms Stephanie Brown. Miles had tracked her down to *Fal-de-Ro* in Islington, a small fashion design house of which she was Executive Director. She'd shaken his hand with warmth; he noted a large emerald-and-diamond eternity ring, a well-cut suit which hugged her full hips.

'Peter?' she said, crossing her legs and dangling a high-heeled patent-leather shoe from one foot. 'Haven't seen him in years. Not since we split up, in fact. I put that bit of my life behind me.' The full lips pouted. 'We all do stupid things when we're young, don't we, Sergeant? What's he gone and done now?'

'What makes you say that?'

'Nothing – just a joke. Would you like some tea? Oolong? Earl Grey?'

'No thanks, this won't take long. When were you married to Peter?'

'Between 1977 and 1979. The longest two years of my life. Don't get me wrong, he was never violent or anything. It was just that he was … well, not quite right somehow. Not normal at all. And I was bored. He never seemed to want to get on with his life.'

'What do you mean, not quite right?'

'Oh, you know. To be honest, I can't really say what I mean. He was very good in the house – a perfectionist – and he worked hard at his job. But it was as if I wasn't the most important thing in his life, if you know what I mean.'

'Other women?'

‘No, no – that’s just what I mean. Nothing like that. Might have been easier if there had been.’ She adjusted her silk scarf. ‘It’s as if there was something going on in his head which was far more important than I’d ever be. Can you understand that?’

‘Oh, yes. Any idea what it was?’

‘What was going on in his head? You must be joking. I’m a fashion designer, not a shrink. And he was very close. Never let me in.’

‘Is that why you split up?’

‘Well, not really. He could be good fun, sometimes, I’ve got to give him that. And he didn’t mind that I was overweight – I had a real problem in those days, I’ve lost a lot since then. It was because he didn’t want children. I think I might have stuck it out longer if it hadn’t been for that. I was desperate. I was about to go to and see about fertility treatment when he told me he’d had the snip. Out of the blue, just like that. I couldn’t believe it. Had it done before we were married and hadn’t ever bothered to tell me. Didn’t want kids at all. So that was that. I divorced him.’

‘How was he about the divorce?’

‘Very upset when I first told him. Took a hammer to a door and smashed a few holes in it. But a lot of men would’ve done that, wouldn’t they? After that, though, it was all very amicable; well, as amicable as these things ever are, I suppose. But much easier than my second divorce. We split the house; Peter moved back in with his mother. Perhaps he was secretly relieved; I’m not quite sure why he got married in the first place.’

‘And the mother? What was she like?’

‘Well, funny you should mention that. She was creepy. Not a bit like my current mother-in-law. She’s eighty now, but she’s really feisty, and a good friend, you know? Used to help with the kids when they were younger. Third time lucky for me – mother-in-law and husband. And kids. But Joan – Peter’s mum – was odd. In a different way from Peter, though I can’t put my finger on it. She always looked down her nose at me, even though I’d got a degree and a good job and all that.’

‘Did she ever talk about his father?’

‘Never. It was like he’d never existed. Peter didn’t say much either, come to that; he told me the story once, then never spoke about it again, made it plain it wasn’t something I should bring up.’

‘How did he get on with his mother?’

‘It was a relationship which looked fine from the outside. But if you ask me, there wasn’t that much love lost between them.’

‘You implied earlier that you wouldn’t be surprised if Peter had got himself into trouble. Can you explain that?’

‘Well, I’m not sure really. It’s just something you say, isn’t it? But then I don’t suppose I’d be that surprised if he’d done something stupid. You never knew with Peter; he always seemed to be on a different wavelength.’

‘Did he ever show signs of violence? Apart from the incident with the hammer, that is?’

‘No, never. I said that. He never let himself go.’

It was cold in the car but he couldn’t bring himself to leave. He knew his brooding was useless but he couldn’t stop himself. What was Marchmont’s connection with Julia? Was she up there with him now? Don’t be ridiculous. She wouldn’t be that stupid.

31.

Only the faintest flicker of recognition passed over John Selby’s face when he saw Julia sit down at a small table near the entrance to the Blue Teapot.

‘Miss Dalton, what a pleasant surprise,’ he said as he approached the table. His apron was spotless, like his café. Clean tables, gleaming cutlery, a floor which had obviously been swept more than once that day.

‘Mr Marchmont,’ she said. ‘I suppose that’s who you are?’

He smiled. ‘I can recommend the chicken and pesto wrap. Or the coffee cake. On the house of course.’

She ordered a cappuccino and the cake. If he was taken aback, he didn’t show it. When she’d finished eating he sat down at her table. There was only one other customer, a middle-aged woman reading a tattered paperback copy of *Ulysses* over a pot of tea.

‘So what brings you to the Blue Teapot?’

‘Three guesses.’ She scooped up a spoonful of delicate froth from her cappuccino, let the spoon fall into the saucer with a clunk and lifted her head to stare him in the eyes.

‘OK, so you’ve rumbled me.’ He spread his hands wide. ‘Does that have to change anything between us?’

‘Not necessarily. Since the only thing between us is an arrangement to share historical sources.’

‘Goodbye, Peter,’ said the woman, tapping him on the shoulder as she passed his chair.

‘Goodbye, Mrs Longshaw.’ He got up and held the door open for her.

‘However,’ Julia continued once he had sat down again, ‘since that is the only thing between us, you’ll forgive me for being suspicious about your use of an alias.’

‘It’s not that much of an alias. John’s my middle name. My mother used to call me John sometimes. And Selby was her maiden name. Were I ever to publish my findings, it would be as John Selby.’

‘Yet everyone round here seems to know you as Peter Marchmont.’

‘That’s my business name. A name for each part of my life, if you like.’

‘Pardon me if I’m not convinced.’

‘Do you need to be?’

‘I don’t give a toss about what you call yourself. What I do care about is the stuff you’re passing me. Why use a false name if you’ve got nothing to hide? It seems pretty suspicious to me.’

‘Perhaps just for the fun of it? A bit of the old cloak and dagger. Lace cuffs and buckskin breeches.’

‘You expect me to believe that?’

‘Why not? I’ve always had a lively imagination. An only child, you know. How did you find out? About my name.’

‘That’s irrelevant. You were taking a bit of a chance, weren’t you? I could have walked in here off the street any day.’

‘Which proves how little I meant it as a real disguise. Just the outworking of a little fantasy. A bit of harmless fun. Is that so bad?’

‘As I say, I couldn’t care less what you do for fun. All I want is the information. But how can I be sure it’s all above board? I can’t afford to get involved in anything iffy.’

‘You only have my word for that,’ he said, placing his right hand over his heart. ‘What I have I am prepared to share with you. You can take it or leave it; it’s your choice.’

‘So why are you prepared to share your sources with me?’

‘Because I get something in return. It’s like I said in February; we each gain by pooling our resources.’

‘You’re sure of that?’

‘That’s a silly question, Miss Dalton, as I’m sure you’re aware. If I were up to no good, I’d hardly admit it, would I? But since you’re here,’ – he stood up and waved his arm histrionically to the corner of the room – ‘let me show you the very place in which Henri de Saint-Gilles was apprehended by the King’s officers. On information given them by the traitor Turnbull.’

She followed him to the blue plaque and read its text.

‘So this was Turner’s coffee house?’

‘Indeed it was.’

‘And how do you know it was from this seat exactly that Saint-Gilles was taken?’

‘There’s an account of the arrest in the *Observer* – do you know it?’

‘No. I only know the one in the *Morning Chronicle*.’

‘It describes the layout of the coffee-house in some detail. Of course it would have been different then.’

‘Wasn’t it bigger than this? I thought there were thirty-odd people here the night Saint-Gilles was arrested.’

‘Yes, it was. What is now the Blue Teapot’s kitchen – he gestured beyond the counter – was then part of the coffee-house. The kitchen was in what is now the yard, in a sort of lean-to, knocked down at some point in the nineteenth century.’

‘It’s rather moving. The plaque.’ She stared at it, imagining Saint-Gilles sitting in a booth with Turnbull and Montagu. In his memoir Montagu had glossed over the affair between Turnbull and Saint-Gilles, but Julia had recently come across a letter, written a few years later to a friend, in which he gave a more detailed account of that evening in Turner’s coffee house:

> Henri had called for a bowl of punch. We were sitting in our usual alcove, with that afternoon’s news-paper. Henri was much concerned about the fate of his countrymen, against whom the tide of the war was turning. Though he professed himself a cautious

admirer of Buonaparte, he never gave so much as an inkling of the extent of his allegiance to his country, a circumstance which made the subsequent catastrophe all the more surprising.

Richard was late that afternoon. We joked about the possible reasons for his absence; for, though he rarely had any regularity of employment, and little routine in his daily habits, he was never known to be late for any engagement or meeting. 'My father's watch,' he used to say, patting his pocket, 'has never let me down. I kept only two items of his inheritance: his watch and his edition of Johnson's Dictionary. And I seem to remember that the great man made a comparison between the two.' We had heard Johnson's dictum so many times, that we knew it by heart and would declaim it together, all three of us: 'Dictionaries are like watches, the worst is better than none, and the best cannot be expected to go quite true.' And, indeed, I have never seen a finer watch than Richard's, which was of exquisite workmanship – though it kept but poor time, and his punctuality must have been due to some other cause; an instinct, perhaps, born of telling time by the sun during his years of wandering.

Such happy times we had, the three of us, in those two years when we all lived close by each other in this village. But Richard and Henri shared a penumbral darkness, of which I am still largely ignorant. —

And, as we understood later, it was not lateness which kept Richard from our company that evening. Mrs Turner had just brought the bowl of punch to our table, hot and fragrant, when a group of the King's men burst in. One of them shouted Henri's name, but so garbled it – 'Henry de Saint Gillies' – that at first I did not understand who it was they came for. Henri remained unmoved, as if it had nothing to do with him. It was over in a few moments; I had hardly the time to register the words 'high treason' before I was pushed aside by one of the men; the bowl of punch was spilt and Henri taken, with extreme roughness though they were five to one and he offered no resistance. I remembered a former occasion, upon which Henri had been arrested for uttering seditious words, a charge of which he had soon been acquitted. 'Have no fear, my friend,' I shouted as soon as I got my breath back – they were already hustling him through the door – he was bleeding from a cut on his cheek – 'you will soon be free.' He did not turn his head, or acknowledge my words.

'So tell me,' said Julia, turning from the plaque, 'the origin of your interest in Saint-Gilles.'

He smiled, piling up plates and cutlery from the empty tables. ‘I’m his descendant. You see, therefore, why it is so important for me that the truth is established.’

‘You’ve traced your descent from Henri de Saint-Gilles?’

‘An aunt of mine did it. Well, some of it; I’ve filled in the rest myself. So there you are.’ He loaded up a large tray and carried it into the kitchen. ‘I know what you’re going to say,’ he said when he returned. ‘I can tell by the look on your face.’

‘Henri de Saint-Gilles died childless.’

‘Yes, he did. But there was a nephew.’

‘Raoul?’

‘Correct. Henri adopted the boy when his mother died. She was Henri’s sister.’

‘Rosine.’

‘Yes. I see you’ve done your homework. So all Henri’s remaining property in France went to Raoul, who to all intents and purposes was Henri’s son.’

‘But …’

‘But what?’

‘Didn’t Raoul die when he was fourteen?’

‘Whatever gave you that idea?’

‘I read it somewhere, not long ago. In a document written by Richard Turnbull.’

‘And what did Turnbull know about Raoul?’

‘Well … I suppose Saint-Gilles talked about him. But Turnbull seems to have thought that Raoul died a few months after his mother.’

‘Which just goes to show how little we can rely on his version of events. Raoul de Saint-Gilles lived well into adulthood, died sometime in the early 1850s. Not very old – about my age, in fact. But he had four surviving children: a daughter by his first wife, who died in childbirth, and three sons by his second.’

He started to wipe the old pine tables. Julia said nothing. As she stood on the platform at Clapham Common tube station, she wondered just how important the fact of John Selby’s – Peter Marchmont’s – descent from Saint-Gilles was to him. If he was correct, and Raoul de Saint-Gilles had in fact lived into adulthood, it might be a terrible shock for him to discover that Raoul de Saint-Gilles was also Richard Turnbull’s son. Marchmont’s approach was by and large, she reflected, much simpler than her own. For him it was a matter of black and white. Turnbull, however you observed him, was always a traitor. Good old-fashioned cops and robbers; no grey

areas, no complications. Which would make the fact that he was descended from the arch-villain in his version of events all the more horrifying.

Nice café, though. Understated, unpretentious. Clean and comfortable. Excellent cappuccino. And the cake had had just the right balance of coffee and sugar.

At London Bridge, waiting for the train, she rang Miles.

'Hi Julia.'

'Miles, we've got to talk.'

'What about?'

'Not over the phone. Can we meet for tea?'

'That sounds ominous.'

'Well, it's serious, at any rate.'

'Can't do tonight; I'm on nights. Or tomorrow. Thursday?'

'Thursday's fine. Seven-thirty?'

'Eight's better for me. Shall we try the Hob?'

'OK. Unless you fancy the Spanish Galleon in Greenwich. The food's very good there.'

'What's all this about, Julia? What aren't you telling me?'

'I'll tell you on Thursday.'

'I'd prefer the Hob in that case.'

'I'll see you there.'

She slammed her phone shut. He wouldn't like it. Tough. It was his own fault. When she got home, she rang her parents, emailed a friend about a recital at Handel's house, showered and sat at her desk in her pyjamas. There were only a few pages left of the English section of Richard Turnbull's journal.

> I did not join the society that Mr Hanbury's men were about to form – I had given him my word, and they were, as he said, too suspicious of me. Not long after that, I was made to work as assistant to Gerrard, and the men in any case found out who I was. – I have no doubt this was G's doing, and as a result many of them believed me to be some sort of spy sent in by Mr Hanbury – a fact I found very bitter at the time, but it is an irony which makes me laugh now. Having acted with no duplicity whatsoever – the speech I had given at their meeting was an outpouring of ideas and feelings which, if unformed, were entirely sincere – I felt keenly the injustice of their suspicion. Yet

many accusations flew around in those days – and it is, as I well know, a far from clear-cut matter to determine who is a spy and who not.

My promise to Mr H. prohibited me only from joining the particular society we had talked of; I therefore sought out the newly-formed Corresponding Society which had been mentioned, and began to attend their meetings at the Bell in Exeter-street. I gladly paid the penny a week subscription, and was welcomed by the artisans who were its members – tailors, shoemakers, carpenters and the like.

I have ever been uncertain of my father's motive in sending me to London that year. He claimed it was to give me a taste of hard work – but if that was his plan, it miscarried; for all the tasks I was put to at the manufactory sickened me. I was horrified by the length of the working day, the consequent lack of hours for leisure or even for thought, the dull regularity of dreary tasks carried out in order to earn a pittance – a pittance which only in the good years, when bread was plentiful and prices low, fed the men and their families. And all this for the profit of another, who lived in luxury.

The professions were barred to me because I could not attend either of our illustrious universities; but even a profession would have become tedious, in time. I am quickly bored and must always move on to something new. (I hear England is soon to have another university – in London – one which will let in all sorts: dissenters, Catholics, Jews – even atheists. — A small, late progress, though a welcome one.)[7] Nor am I able to subject myself to an arbitrary authority, the cruel whims of one who exercises power merely because he has money or friends in high places – or who, like Gerrard, had climbed to a foreman's position over the backs of his fellow-workers and was now determined to dominate and crush those under him. I have always refused to live subjugated to the will of another.

But I have since suspected, that in sending me to his old friend's manufactory, my father had another purpose: that I might experience at first hand the life of an ordinary working man, and understand that this was how most men lived. On that score, my time in London was fruitful. But would he have been proud of what I did? I never told him what I had got up to while staying with Mr Hanbury; I wrote him on only a few occasions, and with little detail. Did I fear, as I told myself then, that my letters might be intercepted and incriminate not only myself but my companions? Or was I too immersed in the new life I had discovered to waste time recounting it to my father?

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[7] This is a later note, scrawled between the lines of the original text; evidence that Turnbull reread at least some of his work. He refers here to University College, founded in 1826. JD.

I was made to work for eight weeks or so with Mr Gerrard, whose hatred of me increased after my attendance at the workers' meeting. Instead of teaching me his part of the business, he made me run errands for him, thinking thus to demean me. But this abuse of power was an open door to me; for the running of errands, however menial, was a licence to roam the streets of the city, to immerse myself in its protean life without the exhaustion which had attended my previous tasks. I tried Gerrard's patience by taking an inordinate amount of time over these errands, wandering for hours in the city, discovering streets and byways I had never seen before. His favourite punishment for what he called 'such arrant time-wasting' was to have me sit at a high desk and copy out receipts, letters and accounts for hours at a time. At this I excelled, but I sighed and groaned over it, pretending that I needed more time to complete it – until he disappeared to make his tour of the workshop, at which I would pull a book from my pocket and read until his return.

It was during those forbidden outings that I became intimately acquainted with the city. Contrary to what I told Gerrard, I have always had an excellent memory; I have only to walk once down a street and I know for ever its name, where it leads, the buildings to be found there and the nature of its inhabitants. London was a box of delights to me; a promiscuous mix of high and low, light and dark, thronging crowds, deserted streets, dead ends and foul alleys. Often I would walk down to the river – an artery running endlessly through the city – and watch the boats and barges upon it. One evening, not far from St Stephen's, I heard the loveliest music I have ever heard in my life. I had been sent by Gerrard at five o'clock to deliver a message to a gentleman on Fish-street Hill and had lingered on my way back; first by the Monument and then on the steps by Calvert's brewery, where the smell of the beer-making balanced the acrid stench of filth, bodies and mud. I returned along Wallbrook, the sky full of gunmetal cloud following a rainstorm, the sun shining down on the muddy street. Crowds jostled this way and that; a carriage manoeuvring down the middle of the street was forced to stop for an obstruction ahead – two men fighting had overturned a pile of empty casks. Steam and stench rose from a rush of shit let forth by one of the horses. The driver of the carriage bellowed at the fighting men; a young woman was shouting obscenities at her companion, and the infant she held on her hip was wailing at the top of its voice. I walked on, slipping through the crowd – it had become a second nature by then – and turned into an alley which I thought would bring me into Cheapside, but which in fact led to a small square. Though it was not two hundred yards from the heaving street I had just left, it contained a tranquil silence, as if I had been suddenly transported to a different world. From an open window on the first floor of one of the houses came the notes of a fortepiano, and I

found myself unable to move for joy. It was a sonata I had not heard before and have never heard since, full of delicate melodies and dark bass notes. I conjured an idea of the performer – she was young, intelligent, compassionate, lithe of spirit and body, an angel incarnate – and lingered after the piece was finished, hoping to catch a glimpse of her. She did indeed come to the window while I strolled in the street below; but alas! was not the vision of loveliness I had imagined. A fat woman of at least thirty, built like a ship-of-the-line, with a face of such plainness as to be worse than ugly. I raised my hat to her and left the little square, returning the way I had come and thence back to Catherine-street.

It seems somehow fitting that the most important meeting of my time in London – indeed perhaps of my whole life – was with a man who seemed to rise out of the very street, like an autochthon. It was early in the morning – first light. The previous evening had been taken up with a meeting of the Corresponding Society – I had joined Division No. 2, which met at the Unicorn in Covent Garden – where my imagination had been so stirred, that I was unable to return to Mr Hanbury's and go quietly to bed. I walked the streets in a *tourbillon* of excitement, unable to clear from my mind the things I had heard. It was beginning to dawn upon me that the momentous changes which my father said were bound to come one day might be a real possibility now – if not at once, at least within my own lifetime. – I was a very young man then; experience and affliction – which shape and sharpen us all – have since taught me how very wide of the mark those hopes were.

That night – it was in early June of the year 1792 – we had discussed the recent proclamation of the king against so-called wicked and seditious writings; by which was meant those writings which opposed the 'laws and happy constitution of our country'. (Happy constitution! Under which most men lived like slaves, with no share in the government of their country and hardly enough to keep body and soul together, while an overfed Prince ran up debts of half a million pounds.) It was a result of this proclamation that my companions at the Bell had to change their premises; the landlord there, Mr Boyd, having been threatened by the magistrates with the loss of his licence if he continued to allow such meetings on his premises. This was, however, only the beginning of their persecutions – but by the moment of crisis, when innocent men were arrested and imprisoned as traitors for nothing more than discussing the subject of reform, I was on the other side of the Channel, in no less cruel a predicament.

I had walked all night, without knowing exactly where. As the sun came up, the first blush of pink suffusing the filthy streets, they appeared to me in radiant glory and I half-wondered if I had inadvertently stumbled onto the brink of paradise. I passed a workhouse on my right and realized I was in St Giles's. That June morning is incised upon my mind – the darkness imperceptibly dispelled by the golden rays of the sun – two or three crows which suddenly took to the air, their shapes dark against the cloudless blue sky. And I thought then, that these two sights were symbols of things to come: that the light of reform and Free-thinking would dispel the gloom of privilege and superstition; that ordinary people – like the men I had worked alongside – would rise up above the evil of things as they were. It was as if my destiny stood still there, in that early-morning stillness before the commotion of the day. I turned at last, reluctant to move on and dispel the enchantment of the moment. Replacing my hat upon my head, I turned the corner, knowing I must return once more to the mundane concerns of the manufactory, the never-ending clash of metal on metal. My place was not there; it was here, on the cusp of the dawn, where the sun's rays met the shadow of the night.

As I walked on, half-blinded by the light in my eyes, I saw what I took to be a man rising from the depths of the earth. I knew this could not be so, however, and soon established that he had climbed a set of stairs leading from a cellar. (I am uncertain of the exact location of this encounter – I think it most likely to have been Lascells Court.) I was about to walk on, but the stranger seemed to want to walk with me. After a few moments of silence, I remembered that I had seen him at the meetings of the Society; his name was Silas W—, a serious, taciturn man who smoked his pipe at the back of the room and who spoke always to the point, rarely indulging in pleasantries or conversation for its own sake; a deep and thoughtful man whose face was overshadowed by God knows what misery.

He had a proposal, he said, to put to me. We stopped at a small ordinary, where he bought coffee and rolls for us both. He then walked with me towards the Strand and asked me to consider what he had said. I replied that I had no need to consider, and we shook hands upon the matter there and then. I made my way to Catherine-street amongst the orange sellers, costermongers and other inhabitants of the wakened city – a city which seemed like some vast machine, monstrous yet alluring, with a life of its own. A labyrinth whose Minotaur was not at its centre but everywhere, in which one could lose oneself for ever without wanting to escape.

I was reprimanded severely by Mr Hanbury for having stayed out all night. How could he answer to my father if harm came upon me? And Mrs H. had hardly slept, so anxious had she been for my safety. He sent me to offer my apologies to her and said I

should go straight to the manufactory without breakfast. I was faint from tiredness and hunger, but could think only of my next meeting with Silas W— and those to whom he was to introduce me.

Thus it was that I was drawn in to that mechanism – and I cannot even now say whether it was for good or ill. There are those who would say, that treason is treason and justly punished by death and mutilation. But if a government is corrupt and putrid and works to bolster nefarious privilege and stifling tradition, is it not right to struggle against it, though that struggle constitutes treason? There exist two Englands, perhaps, to sustain one of which is to betray the other.

Why did I act as I did? That question demands a multiplicity of answers – but on that June morning I was driven by only two impulses. The first: a burning desire to effect a transformation in this country – and the second: a boyish enthusiasm, impulsive and reckless. Who am I? Who was I then? Are we the same man? Was I aware of the darkness I was plunging myself into – a murky world of ghosts and shadows, where all was uncertain? Perhaps not. It seemed at the time to be the beginning of an adventure; but it is one from which it is difficult to disengage oneself. It becomes a way of life. Yet it has been, I think, a way of life particularly suited to my nature. To be able to live as one thing and another. A shadow cannot exist without the light against it.

What dreams we had – yet how empty they are now! All those friends now dead, once so full of hope and fervour.

Empty dreams! – I dreamt last night of Sophie – still, after all these years, she walks the hidden places of my mind; and only there, in those delusive visions, do I see her as she was, before that awful day. I dreamt of the quarrel we had in Paris, Newman and Henri and I, about whether the franchise should be extended to all, or whether restrictions were necessary. I was for giving all citizens the vote, but H. and N. agreed with the Convention's early ruling that only those who paid enough taxes should be eligible. (Henri, perhaps because he was an ex-aristo, was never in favour of allowing the common people too much power. Newman believed that money alone endowed worth, and that if a man could not make a fortune, he was not worthy of the franchise.) Sophie entered as we were arguing, a pile of pamphlets under her arm, fresh from the printer – and caused an uproar amongst us by saying that the Jacobins' view of women was archaic – that if women could die in the streets in defence of the Patrie, they too were worthy of the vote. Women don't understand politics, said Henri. Women are incapable of understanding them, said Newman.

— The matter of understanding is a spurious one, she said; for men are not enfranchised by their understanding. Under the ancien régime it was position and

wealth which conferred the right to vote and to hold office. If it were a matter of intellect would not many men, rich as well as poor, be disenfranchised? Besides, do you believe I understand less than you? she almost shouted at Newman, who took a step backwards. And you, Raoul, what do you think? she said, rounding on me. I had to admit that I had thought little about it.

— And what do you think you are doing in this city at this time, if you have not cared to think about such an important matter? She would not be surprised if none of us had so much as heard of the *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Citizeness*, let alone read it. Henri said he had indeed heard of it, but reckoned its author somewhat dubious; to which Sophie replied that a work should be judged by its intrinsic merits and not by the life of its author. I laughed, but from delight rather than mockery, and said I had not read it, but that I would lay my hands on a copy forthwith.

It was the sound of my laughter which woke me, a bitter awakening which turned to tears as I realized once again the unalterable, unbearable, fact of her death.

32.

The trial of Henri Jacques de Saint-Gilles, for High Treason
30th January 1813
VII.

Mr Solicitor-General:	Mr Price, you say you met the prisoner at his house in Litchfield-street and at the Queen’s Head in Covent Garden?
John Price:	Yes.
Mr Solicitor-General:	During any of these meetings did you ever receive documents written by him?
John Price:	On several occasions.
Mr Solicitor-General:	And what was the nature of these documents?
John Price:	Notes and letters listing the information he wanted, and from what places.
Mr Solicitor-General:	You are then well acquainted with the prisoner’s handwriting?
John Price:	I would say so.
Mr Solicitor-General:	Now, Mr Price, I would like you to examine these papers and tell me which, if any, are in the prisoner’s handwriting.

These were amongst the papers found at the house in Litchfield-street.

John Price: No. 1 is his handwriting. Nos. 2, 3, 4 and 5 are my own handwriting. No. 6 I am unsure of; it may be that of Mons. Grosmont. Likewise no. 7. No. 8 is his handwriting, and no. 9. No. 10 is the handwriting of Mons. LeConte, his assistant. 11 is his handwriting, 12 is that of Mr Turnbull. Nos. 13, 14, 15 and 16 are the prisoner's writing.

Mr Solicitor-General: Now, I would like you to look at these other papers and tell me, if you are able, whose handwriting they are. These are papers found upon your person at the moment of your apprehension.

John Price: Nos. 1, 2 and 4 are the prisoner's handwriting. Nos. 3 and 5 are not.

Mr Solicitor-General: And whose writing are they?

John Price: They are notes of a personal nature and not relevant to the matter of the prisoner.

Mr Solicitor-General: The documents, nos. 1, 2 and 4, they were all sent you by the prisoner?

John Price: Yes.

Mr Solicitor-General: We note that they are written in French. Was it normal for the prisoner to write you in that language?

John Price: Yes, he often wrote me thus. He thought it safer.

Mr Solicitor-General: You are fluent in that language?

John Price: In French and German alike.

Mr Solicitor-General: Now, before you elucidate these documents for us, we will have their translation read to the court.

Mr Luke Hudson sworn, to interpret the documents produced, they being in the French language.

No. 1 (translation)

My dear Sir, – I beg you to travel south immediately; for I have heard of our friend Mr Miller that there are some fine antiquities to be had in Portsmouth. Travel now and endeavour to procure whatever you can at as reasonable a price as possible. If you lack funds for the stage, my assistant will provide them.

Yours, HL.

Mr Solicitor-General: What does he mean by this talk of fine antiquities? Did you do business of this sort with the prisoner also?

John Price: No; my business was my own. It is true that I occasionally bought and sold antiquities of good quality. But here, it refers to the gathering of intelligence. ‘Antiquities’ was a word between us, by which was meant intelligence. It made the document safe, were it to be intercepted.

Mr Solicitor-General: Let me see if I understand you correctly; you are here being exhorted to travel to Portsmouth with all possible haste, to gather what intelligence is to be had; is that correct?

John Price: It is.

Mr Solicitor-General: I beg Mr Hudson to continue.

No. 2 (translation)

My dear friend,

Regarding our meeting this evening, do not forget to bring to the usual place the book of which we spoke at our last. I will bring the 10 guineas owed you from last month; if the book be satisfactory, there will also be forthcoming this month’s remuneration; till then, I am, your dear friend,

Patrick Redmond

Mr Solicitor-General: I presume, since this letter is in the prisoner’s hand, that Mr Patrick Redmond is an alias?

John Price: It was a way of communicating information without writing it in full. If the prisoner referred to a meeting and wrote as Patrick Redmond, that meant we were to meet at the Queen’s Head. We used other fictitious names to specify other places.

Mr Solicitor-General: I see. And the book; what does that signify?

John Price: It means I had to bring him the information he had requested.

Mr Solicitor-General: This refers to intelligence?

John Price: The same.

Mr Solicitor-General: Let us hear the last letter.

No. 4 (translation)

London, Thursday evening, 30th June, 1812

Sir, I exhort you not to call upon this house; for the scullery maid is fallen sick of the small-pox and we are all at risk of contagion. Send your communications to Mr Humphrey Brown, at his address. If urgent, mark it so.

I beg you will also be so kind as to send some wine and cakes; for we do very ill here, and may not leave the house.

Your affectionate friend,

Charles

Mr Solicitor-General:	Humphrey Brown is a cipher also, like Patrick Redmond?
John Price:	That is so.
Mr Solicitor-General:	And what was Mr Brown's address?
John Price:	It stood for the chapel off Castle-street. On sudden emergencies, if the Queen's Head were not to be used, letters could be passed to one of Mons. de Lessac's men at a certain time of the day behind the chapel.
Mr Solicitor-General:	And the small-pox?
John Price:	That meant that something had happened at the house which made it imprudent for me to approach it.
Mr Solicitor-General:	And the wine and cakes? What do they stand for?
John Price:	Not for anything; that was a genuine request for wine and cakes.
Mr Solicitor-General:	Do you know the nature of the crisis which necessitated your absence from Litchfield-street?
John Price:	I did not.
Mr Solicitor-General:	But you know it now?
John Price:	I now know someone had kicked up a breeze at the house by breaking in at night and searching Mons. de Lessac's cabinet. Mons. de Lessac became very anxious at that.
Mr Solicitor-General:	He thought he might be found out?
John Price:	I suppose so.
Mr Solicitor-General:	Now, Mr Price, I should like you to tell me what you did after you had quarrelled with Mons. de Lessac.
John Price:	I quit his service.
Mr Solicitor-General:	But you did not do so immediately?
John Price:	No. Before I had done so, I met Mr Turnbull.

Mr Solicitor-General: Explain the nature of your relationship with Mr Turnbull.

John Price: He appeared to me first as an old friend who was in need of employment; he asked if I were able to find him a position. Later he revealed himself to me as a government man.

Mr Solicitor-General: And you doubted not that what he told you was the truth?

John Price: He showed me proof. He had documents which confirmed his position as an emissary of King George's government.

Mr Solicitor-General: And why did he reveal this fact to you?

John Price: He wanted us to come to an agreement.

Mr Solicitor-General: Can you specify the nature of that agreement?

John Price: It was that I should give up my allegiance to Mons. de Lessac and become a witness for Mr Turnbull. That I should turn King's Evidence, in fact.

Mr Solicitor-General: How did you react to his suggestion?

John Price: I refused at first.

Mr Solicitor-General: On what grounds?

John Price: I was afraid of the prisoner's reaction should he find out. Mons. de Lessac was not tolerant of traitors to his service.

Mr Solicitor-General: An irony, by God, if ever there was one. You afterwards changed your mind, however?

John Price: It seemed to be the correct course of action. I realised I had acted in error in my connexion with the prisoner and wished to make amends.

Mr Solicitor-General: So you agreed to do as Mr Turnbull wished, and inform on Mons. De Lessac?

John Price: I did.

Mr Solicitor-General: And how was this to be achieved?

John Price: I was to carry on as normal, sending information to the prisoner. But I would also inform Mr Turnbull of the prisoner's whereabouts and his intentions.

33.

‘So what is it you want to talk about?’ said Miles, putting down two large glasses of red wine. ‘It’ll be about twenty minutes for the food.’

‘I’d have thought that would be obvious. You followed me.’

‘What?’

‘Don’t play the innocent. I know you’re the detective, but credit me with some intelligence.’

‘How did you find out?’

‘Good old-fashioned deduction.’

‘Which means?’

‘The only way you could have known I was meeting Peter Marchmont was if you’d followed me. Then I suppose you followed him back to the Blue Teapot – which I’d never heard of, by the way.’

‘And now you’re very angry about it.’

‘You bet I’m angry. What did you think you were playing at?’

‘I was concerned about you, that’s all.’

‘And that gives you the right to go following me around as if I were a common criminal? I can look after myself.’

‘You don’t know what you’re getting yourself into. At least now you’ll admit that you know Marchmont?’ He pointed his finger at her. ‘That wasn’t very honest, was it?’

‘I didn’t know that I knew him. It was only when I went to the café that I realized who he was.’

‘You went there? That was a bit of a risk, wasn’t it?’

‘Going to a café in broad daylight and having a coffee? It’s the sort of risk I take quite often.’

‘You know what I mean.’

The food arrived. Miles sprinkled a liberal quantity of salt and vinegar over his steak and kidney pie and chips. Her poached fish looked white and insipid by contrast; she felt suddenly drained of energy.

‘So how come you only recognized him when you went in the café?’

‘He’d used a different name.’

‘Well, that says it all, doesn’t it? I told you, the man’s got “crook” written all over him.’

‘So arrest him.’

‘I can’t. He’s clean.’

‘You’ve checked?’

‘Of course I’ve checked. First thing I did.’

‘So if he’s clean, how come you know he’s a crook?’

‘I just know.’

‘How?’

‘I just do.’

‘But this has actually got nothing to do with you, has it? It’s my business.’

‘Do you trust him?’

‘No. That’s the point. It’s irrelevant that he’s creepy, because our only point of contact is the exchange of documents in public places. And it’s not a crime to be creepy, is it?’

‘I was genuinely worried about you. Though at first I did think you might be having an affair.’

‘And?’

‘And what?’

‘We’re not joined at the hip, Miles. I can see anyone I like.’

‘And are you?’

‘No. if I was, I’d tell you. I don’t do that sort of secrecy.’

‘Not even that French guy?’

‘No, not even him – and I’m not going to mention his name, in case you get Interpol on to him. There are other ways of relating to people than having affairs.’

‘You just don’t understand, do you?’

‘I don’t think I do. But there’s a discrepancy in the way we see this relationship, Miles, and I’m not sure it’s got much life left in it.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘I will not,’ – she put down her knife and fork and looked him square in the eyes – ‘I will not tolerate a man who spies on me behind my back. For whatever reason.’

‘It wasn’t spying.’

‘Pardon me? It was underhand and deceitful, and how you thought you could ever get away with it, I don’t know. Do you think I’m an idiot?’

‘That isn’t the point.’ He pushed away his plate. ‘Can you forgive me? For following you.’

‘I don’t know. Can I trust you not to do it again? Or something equally proprietorial. Your anxiety about me doesn’t give you the right to take over my life.’ She finished her wine. ‘Do you want to come back for coffee? It’s a bit noisy in here.’

On the way back to her flat he said, ‘You need to start living in the real world.’

‘You sound like my mother.’

‘Well, perhaps she’s got a point. Normal people have a life. They fall in love and get married, have fun, have kids. Go on holiday together. Come home and watch the telly at night.’

‘And have you stopped to think that maybe that’s not what I want from life?’ She shoved the key into the lock and flung open the door. ‘The real world’s gone mad, Miles, so I’d be justified in not wanting to conform to it entirely. Not that I agree with you that I don’t live in it. I’m good at my job, never miss a deadline; I’m on track with my PhD, I’m rarely overdrawn and I manage to wash, clothe and feed myself without anyone interfering. What more do you want? Would you like coffee, or is it too late?’

‘I’d prefer tea.’

She filled the kettle, lifted down her brown earthenware teapot and two green mugs. ‘The way I live my life has nothing to do with you.’

‘So where are we going? Us? What’s our future?’

‘Is there a future?’

‘If you go out with someone, it’s got to go somewhere, hasn’t it?’

‘Has it? Can’t it just meander along peacefully? I don’t want a permanent relationship.’

‘What do you want, then?’

‘Just a relationship, I suppose. Sex and companionship. Something of the moment.’

‘But everybody gets married in the end.’

‘I don’t think so.’ She poured the tea. ‘Besides, I’ve got serious problems with traditional marriage.’

‘What about living together? Would you consider that?’

‘Living together’s just become the new marriage. That was a theoretical question, wasn’t it?’

‘No, I’m asking you if you’d live with me. Can’t you see, Julia, that I love you?’

‘I’m not sure exactly what you mean by that. You love me so much you follow me to a meeting and only let it slip six months or so later. Besides, I don’t want all that traditional relationship stuff, and I don’t think I’ve ever led you to believe otherwise.’

‘So what do you want?’

‘Something minus the traditional baggage. I don’t see, in theory, why a relationship shouldn’t be a union of equal minds, a partnership of intellectual as well as sexual passion. I just don’t see much evidence for it in the couples I know.’

‘What do you mean, a union of equal minds?’

‘Well, to sit in the evening, each at one’s own desk, working, bouncing ideas off each other – that could have its charms. Or each having your own place, so you’re not living in somebody’s pocket all the time.’

‘Are you really such a freak?’

‘If that’s being a freak, then maybe I’m a freak. But yoke us together and one or both of us would go under. Mary Wollstonecraft talked about creating a “new genus” of woman, and it’s still not been done. I’d like to explore that, shatter the traditional patterns. Especially where domesticity’s concerned.’

‘Always the iconoclast, aren’t you?’

‘And proud of it.’

‘What’s so bad about a bit of domesticity? You don’t know what you’re talking about.’

‘And when have you ever come home at the end of a hard day and had to get a meal on the table?’

‘And when have you?’

‘I did it for three years. My mother was ill a few years ago and I came back from Paris to look after her and my father. That was when I taught at the secondary school in Windermere. I got home at five-thirty and cooked the tea. Meat and two vegetables every night. Then I cleared up and after that I did my preparation and marking. Come eleven o’clock I was so tired I couldn’t even read the local paper. At the weekend I washed and ironed and did the shopping. I had the devil of a job

persuading them to get a cleaner; you'd have thought it the most terrible ignominy to pay a stranger to do what your daughter could do for nothing.'

'But it wouldn't be the same with me.'

'I know. And with the right woman, Miles, you'd make a wonderful husband – no, I'm not being sarcastic even though it's an awful cliché. But that woman's not me. I'm too truculent by far.'

She slammed her mug down and carried the tray through to the kitchen. But he looked so forlorn, sitting on her sofa with his head in his hands, staring at the accumulated crumbs on the carpet, that her anger turned abruptly to pity. She sat down and put her arms round him, and they made it up, after a fashion. She made more tea, over which they sat companionably together on the sofa in near-silence, and afterwards went to bed. And in the morning, waking in a tangle of limbs under the heavy duvet, his breath warm on her neck, she felt as though a storm had passed and the sun had come out.

But that, she reflected as she made the bed after Miles had got up and gone to work, was an illusion. Whichever way she looked at it, it was crooked. They each wanted different things out of the relationship; each had made assumptions about the other. He loved her, and for him that was all there was to it. But she loved him and didn't love him. He wanted a steamy house and a brood of children to come home to, and she wanted mahogany bookcases in a silent sunlit room.

That evening, Friday, she gave herself a night off and went to the cinema with three colleagues, and after that to a wine bar. The next day she was up and sitting at her desk before seven, poring over Richard Turnbull's journal.

> The sea: neither in one place nor another. Anticipation, possibility. Between nations, beyond boundaries.
>
> Love also: a crossing of boundaries. A wave washing over the gun-wale in a storm; though its approach was gentle enough – one of those slow, rolling waves which seems at first hardly to move, but which gathers momentum and amplitude and – with that – destructive power, as it travels.
>
> In Paris I fell in love for the first and only time. Passion overwhelming.
>
> In those dark, wicked times she stood out, a slender crescent moon in a winter sky. Silver, quicksilver. Her family were aristocrats, although several of its younger

generation had sided with the principles if not the practice of the Revolution. They had lands near Saumur, and both her brothers had enlisted as *bleus* in the army of the Vendée.[8] One was to die at the battle of Le Mans six months later; nothing was heard of the other. Sophie lived with her aunt in the western outskirts of Paris, amongst trees and lanes which provided some retreat from the unrest of the city. A distant relation, a cousin of her dead mother, I think, had a shop in the rue d'Enfer which sold prints and published papers.

The day on which I first saw her: one o'clock on a warm afternoon in June 1793. She had rushed in from the street, covered head-to-toe in a black cloak. (Unrecognised, one was less likely to be denounced.) Black curls escaping round the rim of her hood; cheeks flushed from walking. Her dark eyes fell on me, a stranger in that group. And who is this? she said imperiously. — Ça va, c'est un ami, said Newman, in his drawling French. (His grammar was perfect, his accent irreparably American. Was it laziness, affectation, or plain arrogance which caused him never even to attempt a correct pronunciation? It was as if, even then, he was daring all and sundry to confront him, flaunting his privileged status, whatever that might have been.) Saint-Gilles, who had been slumped in a chair in the corner, his left leg over its arm, stood up and introduced us. She smiled at me, then, her eyes looking directly into mine; and I had the disconcerting impression that she was there and then unmasking me.

— May I offer you a glass of vinegar, Mademoiselle? I asked. — Vinegar? She looked puzzled. — Well, you French call it wine, butted in Newman, but it seems that all that is left in Paris is this vinegar. — You should bring some from your Embassy, in that case, I said; you Americans seem to eat and drink better than any of us. I poured out a half-glass which I handed to Mlle Breuil, and sat down absent-mindedly opposite Newman at the small table placed against the wall, where I had been sitting perusing the day's papers. It was as if my life had been cut in two. There was a silence; the stranger, it seemed, was unwilling to speak in front of me (how could she not trust me? – I had risked so much to be in that room at that time, and would later risk all to save her life); and I was for once unsure of myself, my mind scattered into a thousand fragments.

She had thrown back the hood and removed the cloak, and sat looking quizzically at Henri, until he said, You can speak quite freely in front of Raoul. He is as fervent as any of us. And as trustworthy.

And as powerless, in the end.

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[8] The *bleus* were Republican (pro-Government) soldiers during the civil war in the Vendée. JD.

34.

Peter Marchmont looked forward to the beginning of November in the same way that, as a child, he had longed for Christmas. The fading afternoon light gave him a thrill as he looked out of the Blue Teapot's windows at the street lamps and car headlights. Sharp cold and damp drizzle, early whirling snow and incessant rain delighted him equally. And this year he anticipated Henri's advent with all the more excitement; he was in a position now to see his way clear, could reveal to his friend that the success of the project was all but in the bag.

In the early days of their acquaintance, Henri's visits had occurred at random. It was only later, after Peter had learnt of his friend's November arrest, that Henri began to limit his appearances to that period late in the year around its anniversary. And with Peter's move to the Blue Teapot, the ghost had further restricted his appearances, materializing only in the windowless attic.

And there he was one night in the middle of November, when the air was chill with an icy wind and flurries of rain. Peter saw him as soon as he unlocked the door, sitting in his chair in the wedge of light from the little landing, calmly waiting, one exquisitely-breeched leg crossed over the other and his hands clasped on his knee.

'My friend, such a delight,' said Peter, lighting the candles on the sideboard before gently closing the door, shutting out the twenty-first century with its rushing and its indifference.

Henri bowed his head.

'Just wait till you hear what I've been up to.' He poured a glass of Margaux from the decanter, sat behind his desk opposite Henri. 'A toast, my friend. To your exculpation.'

'You have made progress, then?'

'Indeed I have, dear boy. I'll tell you all about it, shall I?'

'Please do.' Henri leant back in the chair, his head to one side.

Forty-five minutes later, Peter said, 'So you see, Henri, by this time next year everything will be sorted out. Your name will be cleared.' Henri seemed pleased – how could he not? – and Peter sat in the ghost's presence until he could keep his eyes open no longer, dropping off into a peaceful doze. When he woke, Henri was gone; but the glow of his presence remained.

35.

‘Who’s that black guy you’ve got in the cells?’ said Miles.

‘We’ve got three black males at this moment in time. And four white, one yellow. Plus old Tompkins, who could be any colour. Not had a wash for thirty years, shouldn’t wonder. Never say we’re not an equal opportunities nick. Did you have anyone particular in mind?’

‘Tall, expensive suit. Came in about an hour ago.’

‘Ah, that would be Mr Paulin.’

‘First name?’

‘Drue.’

‘What’s he in for?’

‘Burglary. Swears black’s white it can’t be him.’

‘Never is, is it? Not till they’re banged to rights. Who brought him in?’

‘Richards. Why?’

‘I’ve seen him somewhere before.’

‘Well, it’s not here. This is Mr Paulin’s first visit. Harangued me for five minutes on how it’s a miscarriage of justice. All the usual bollocks.’

Drue had never, as he’d tried to explain to the custody sergeant, been in trouble with the police before. He picked his men with care and they knew what it was worth not to grass him up. Not that they ever went down for long; it was remarkable what the services of a competent lawyer could achieve. Carrot and stick; it seemed to work.

So he wasn’t quite sure how he’d ended up on the wrong side of a locked door at St John’s Wood police station. Suspicion of burglary, they’d said. Him, Drue, burglary? Never got his hands dirty. They’d got the wrong man. But at the back of his mind, he knew how risky it was getting mixed up with the law: they’d try to fit you up for one thing and before you knew it, they’d got all sorts on you and you were going down. What if he got pulled for a burglary he hadn’t committed and then everything else slipped out? He’d have to play his cards right.

It wasn’t like on the TV; no cups of tea, no cooked breakfast, no cheery custody sergeant. The cell was filthy and stank of stale urine. A dour white officer – he was a head smaller than Drue but looked as though he could have knocked anyone down

with a single blow – had brought a slice of white bread and margarine and a plastic beaker of water at six in the morning.

'Bread and water?' said Drue. 'I thought that went out with the ark.'

'Take it or leave it.'

He sat on the edge of the bed in his shirt and underpants, shivering. Had to keep his trousers nice. Could have done with a cup of tea; it was freezing in the cell. They'd have to let him go, surely? Couldn't have anything on him; certainly not enough to charge him. He looked at his watch. Seven-thirty. He had a geezer to see that afternoon, someone Adam Blunkett had recommended for a job in Hackney. And tomorrow evening he was seeing the Marchmont bloke again, the one with the café. Loaded, he must be. Or barmy. Strange one, that. With most of them it was artefacts, the showier the better; they were collectors who'd go to any lengths to get the next big thing for their collection – a Ming vase, a Queen Anne table, a painting. Books, even, sometimes. But the Marchmont guy wanted papers no one had heard of. Even knew where they were most of the time. Not that Drue was complaining: made the job easier, and security was usually a lot less tight in these little museums and obscure historic houses.

But Marchmont was as eager as the rest of them; the same glint in his eyes, though he made a good show at hiding it. Yet there was something about him that Drue couldn't put his finger on. Vulnerable as well as aggressive; the brown eyes looked out with fear as well as hostility. Little boy lost. In other circumstances, perhaps, he might have been interesting; but not these. There was too much at stake; Marchmont was too much of an unknown quantity. And Drue had made it a rule of his life never to mix business and pleasure. That way they couldn't shop you when you got bored of them. Keep everything separate. Hold all the strings yourself.

He looked at his watch again; seven-fifty. His brief was taking his time. Clarence Bertram was unaware of Drue's occupation, but had helped him out on numerous occasions in the past when legal expertise had been needed. Fat fee, of course. Never see a poor solicitor, do you? Bertram had been in court the previous day and at a dinner that evening; his secretary had said she would inform him of Mr Paulin's predicament as soon as he returned to the office. 'Predicament'; that was the word she'd used. Snooty cow.

Eight o'clock. Eight-thirty. The rattle of a chain, a key in the lock.

'OK, sonny boy, get your trousers on, you're going on an outing. Interview room.'

*

‘Mr Paulin, can you tell us what you were doing in the vicinity of the Swann Road warehouses at four o’clock on the afternoon of November the third?’

Warehouses? Who do they think I am? But he said, ‘Never been near Swann Road. Never heard of it.’

‘I’ll ask the question again. What were you doing at the Swann Road warehouses on the afternoon of November the third?’

‘I swear I don’t know where Swann Road is.’

‘Between the railway station and the new Tesco. Left off the main road as you’re going south. There’s a row of lock-ups and the warehouses are opposite. That jog your memory?’

‘I don’t know where you mean, and that’s the truth. I don’t come up this area a lot.’ He looked the sergeant in the eye.

The sergeant stared back. ‘You were in this area when you were picked up yesterday,’ he said. ‘What were you doing then?’ He had a look about him. Only young, but on a mission.

‘I was supposed to be meeting somebody.’ He’d thought it out beforehand.

‘Does he have a name?’ The sergeant was asking all the questions, still staring. The bulldozer look. Drue had seen it time and time again in his punters. Once the bug got them they couldn’t stop. Had to have it. Didn’t matter what it was, a ring or a statue, a book or a load of old papers; it was the desire that mattered, and the desire had to be fulfilled. Drue dropped his eyes.

‘It was a woman.’

‘Does she have a name, then?’

‘Anna.’

‘Anna what?’

‘I don’t know. I met her a couple of nights ago in a pub in Hackney. She only told me her first name. We were going to meet for a drink at six.’

‘Meet where?’

‘The pub on the corner of Jackson Road.’

‘But when we picked you up, you were walking away from the pub.’

‘I’d got lost. She’d explained how to find it, but I must have gone in the wrong direction when I got out of the station.’

‘OK, well now we’ve cleared that little matter up, I’ll ask you again: what were you doing at the Swann Road warehouses on the day in question? We have a witness who puts you there.’

‘Your witness must be wrong. I wasn’t there.’

‘You’ll be able to give us an alibi, then.’

‘God knows. You think I can remember everything I do, just like that? It was weeks ago.’

Clarence Bertram, who had been making notes on a pad of paper with a roller ball, lifted his head to ask, ‘What day of the week was the third of November, sergeant?’

The sergeant looked at his notes. ‘Wednesday.’

‘Wednesday?’ Drue laughed. ‘Your witness is well wrong, then. I told you, didn’t I? And I can prove it. You bet I can prove it. Mr Bertram, I apologise for bringing you all this way for nothing.’ He pronounced it ‘nuffink’, with deliberate emphasis. It was a false alarm; the plods had cocked up. Mr Bertram raised an eyebrow. Drue turned to the detective sergeant. ‘We all look the same, don’t we? One black man going past a warehouse, I mean. But every Wednesday afternoon, rain or shine, I go down the nursing home in Bethnal Green. Visit my mum. Two-thirty till three-thirty, sometimes a bit longer if she’s *compos mentis*. It’s karaoke on Wednesdays.’

‘And she can vouch for you?’

‘Maybe, maybe not. She sometimes don’t know what day of the week it is. Her and half the others. Sometimes thinks I’m my dad. Or the Prime Minister. But the nurses know who I am. And the cab driver who took me home.’

‘What do you make of that, then?’ said Miles.

‘Bloody witness must have cocked up. He was adamant. I can’t believe it.’

‘I’d check out the alibi. Just in case.’

‘Oh, it’ll be genuine all right. You could see the relief in his face. The guy was sweating till he realized it was a Wednesday. Did you remember where it was you’d seen him?’

‘No, but I’m sure it’ll come to me.’

It came later, with a fleeting memory of his argument with Julia over two months ago. He'd not seen much of her since then; she'd had a lot of work on and had been back up north for Christmas, visiting her parents. That's what she'd said, at least. But that was why Paulin's face had kept nagging at his mind, and why it had taken so long to place him: he'd been out of context. Must be five months ago now. Sitting uncomfortably in his car down the road from the Blue Teapot, he'd seen Paulin hammering on Marchmont's front door. He was sure of it. He'd had an overcoat on then, as well as an expensive suit. And he'd been carrying an attaché case.

Drue Paulin, no form but pulled in for a suspected burglary. Peter Marchmont, also without form, involved in something shifty which was probably carried out on the premises above his café. Paulin visits Marchmont with a bag full of something or other. Coincidence? No way. There was no smoke without fire. Miles had an instinct, and it was usually rock-solid. Occasionally you went down the wrong track; often there wasn't enough evidence. But it was like a sixth sense. Right and wrong, black and white. You just had to do the digging, turn up whatever it was they were hiding.

The alibi checked out. It was bound to; Richards was right. He'd seen the look of relief on Paulin's face as the penny dropped and he realized he was in the clear. The man had been shitting himself till then, tense as a coiled-up spring. The million-dollar question was: what was he so desperate to keep under wraps?

Miles resumed his observations on the Blue Teapot, but Paulin didn't show again. Not much point anyway; he'd need to be there all evening, every evening for it to be worthwhile. It had fulfilled a need to do something; now he knew he'd been right.

The nursing home was council-run but, whether or not he was contributing to his mother's care, Paulin could afford a mortgage on a modern flat in Cambridge Heath. Whatever his business was – and he'd been suspiciously vague about that – it was obviously bringing in a fair amount of dough.

36.

Julia strode across the courtyard of the British Library, her coat open to the icy wind. God, was she glad to be back in London. As she passed Paolozzi's giant statue of Newton, she recited Pope's *Epitaph* under her breath:

> Nature, and Nature's Laws lay hid in Night.
> God said, *Let Newton be!* and All was Light.

Absent-minded, irascible and resolutely dedicated to his work, Newton held a certain charm for Julia. But she admired him most because he had, indeed, shed light on the mechanisms of the universe. In showing that both heavenly and earthly objects were subject to the same laws, he had eradicated the false dichotomy between sublunary and superlunary worlds, imperfect and perfect, and brought into unity what had previously been held to be two incongruent entities.

She'd stayed a week in Thoresbeck with her parents over Christmas, helping her mother to cook lunches and dinners, catching up with a few old friends. She'd gone for walks along the frozen rutted lane which led to the next village; the lane in which, one evening after Christmas four years ago, she'd had a personal apocalypse and made the decision to give up her job in Windermere, leave Thoresbeck and her parents – who were by then more than capable of looking after themselves – and return to London to continue her studies.

It was with renewed fervour that she sat in the enveloping quiet of the British Library and examined the documents in front of her. Early in 1793 Pitt's government, nervous about possible revolutionary activity in the wake of the French Revolution, had introduced compulsory registration for all foreigners living in Britain. The French royalist Claude Antoine Rey had helped in the setting up of the Alien Act and subsequently provided dossiers on suspect émigrés.

On 1st February 1793, one Henri de Lessac had registered as an alien at the Great Marlborough Street Police Office, giving as his address a street in Soho. Rey's dossier on this man, compiled during the same month, proved that Lessac and Saint-Gilles were one and the same:

Henri de Lessac

February 1793

Domicile: Macclesfield-street, number 4

Age: 23

Appearance: height a little below 5 feet. Hair, dark brown, worn short (to which I draw attention). Eyes of light brown, would say hazel. Clothes of an aristocrat; usually to be seen in a well-cut brown coat, somewhat shabby; cream-coloured waistcoat, well-fitting white breeches and silk stockings. Shoes plain.

The person who writes me from Paris and whose word I trust informs me that de Lessac styled himself plain Lessac in that city. The said Lessac (or Saint-Gilles under which name he was also known) is a wholehearted supporter of the Convention and, though an aristocrat by birth, one of that new breed of camelions who have turned traitor to his Country and our ill-used Louis. He has, moreover, been seen in London in the company of Mons. Achille Viart, a known agent of the National Convention. For these reasons – though he has appeared to live quietly in Macclesfield-street since his arrival in this country – I recommend your urgent attention be turned to him as he is like to be one who plots the destruction of this country.

At his trial Henri de Saint-Gilles had claimed that he had lived in England from early 1793 until his arrest in November 1812 without ever returning to his native country. But, if Richard Turnbull's autobiographical account were to be believed, he had been in Paris in 1793. What he was doing there, with Turnbull and an American called Newman, she had no idea. (Could Newman be the 'high-and-mighty American' mentioned by Manon in her journal?) Most suspect aliens were deported, for fear they might incite members of the English population to rebellion; maybe Saint-Gilles had got wind of his fate and pre-empted it.

She spent three weeks trawling through government papers on the off-chance that they would shed some light on Richard Turnbull's activities in 1812. The correspondence of Lord Alexander for that year – some three hundred and fifty documents characterized by a rambling grandiloquence – yielded little she didn't already know about that episode, but with one exception. A letter written to Evan Nepean, the Under-Secretary of State for Home Affairs, just before Turnbull's appointment in May 1812 not only confirmed the trust placed in Turnbull by Lord Alexander, but also revealed the identity of the shadowy Silas W.

9th May, 1812

My Lancashire informant writes that many are still attached to the Luddite cause. His attempts to join committees of weavers in Stockport, Bolton and Eccles have come to nought; it is only with extreme difficulty that an informant may infiltrate the troops of General Ludd, who stick together; and since all are known in a particular village, a new man is generally suspected.

As for the other matter, I have news which will cheer your heart, having with the help of Mr Bellas come across a man who is not only willing to offer his services, but eminently capable of carrying out the task; a combination which, as you well know, is rare enough. It is on two counts that I recommend him: his aptitude in practical matters and his ability in the intricacies of subterfuge. He is, in fact, Bellas's factotum, who has lodged with him for the past two years or so; he seems – and you know how finely-honed is my judgement of character, how able I am to sum up a man at first glance – just the sort of man needed in this affair. I have conversed with him on two occasions in my rooms here, and have little doubt as to his abilities or his allegiance. He is a man of fine intellect, whom, in fact, I have also on more than one occasion invited to my dinner table on account of his lively conversation and ready wit. Bellas, too, has the highest opinion of him; although I must hasten to add, that he is not a true gentleman, having led a life of the utmost unconformity, not to say insolence. I need not point out to you, however, that in this matter these traits are a point in his favour, since the task we demand of him will doubtless take him into the dark regions of our land (I speak both literally and figuratively), in which he will pass all the more unnoticed amongst the low ruffians he is sent to investigate. As you have pointed out to me on many an occasion, if His Majesty's Government were constrained to employ only gentlemen to root out the deadly tares we find carried to our shores, or those which are indigenous to them, we should find ourselves in a sorry predicament indeed.

Turnbull has, moreover, an interesting history. Having heard rumour of a youthful involvement some twenty years ago with the radicals, I made investigation into this report. It is true, that he was a member of that outrageous London Corresponding Society over which His Majesty's Government was obliged to exercise so much of its ingenuity to effect its eradication. It seems our man, Turnbull, was enlisted in the early nineties by Silas Wylde, the veteran of radical activity (and of God knows what knavery besides) who is well-known to us; and who is now – I am thankful to say – *hors de combat*. This, however, is not all. I am told by a reputable informant – though I have been unable to lay my hands upon the details, there being no record of the transaction – that Turnbull, at the same time that he belonged to the said society, worked as a paid informant for Mr Pitt. The establishment of the veracity

of this latter fact is perhaps unnecessary – although, as you can no doubt surmise, I intend to question Mr Turnbull upon the matter; but the former information might well be to our advantage: if he were to pass as an unrepentant radical, and thus gain access to the factions of those damnable demagogues, such a situation would help, not only his task, but ours.

You are aware, I know, of the urgency of this matter. Our man will be available as soon as you give the word; I have agreed terms, and await only your approval.

The papers of the London Corresponding Society confirmed that one Richard Turnbull, labourer, had joined Division 2 on 2nd May 1792. Since this coincided with the dates Turnbull gave in his journal, it was reasonable to assume this was the same Richard Turnbull. Julia also turned up a number of reports on Silas Wylde. He had joined the Society soon after its formation in January 1792 and was by all accounts an active member with extreme views. Nearly four years later, in December 1795, he had been tried for uttering seditious words, found guilty and sentenced to two years in Newgate with a fine of £250.

The government spy Lynam, who infiltrated the Corresponding Society in October 1792 and remained under cover for almost two years, had mentioned Wylde in two of his reports to Evan Nepean:

Division 22, 5 Sepr 1793
Read letters from Delegates in Sheffield & Manchester.
Wylde enquired as to funds to provide new members with copys of Pain's Rights of Man. Argument arose, funds being scarce.

Division 9, 8 Feby 1794
Much was talked of Margarot's condemnation and spirits were low on this account.[9] It was agreed that French words, songs &c., should be used with great care or not at all. Wylde stood up and said, that if a French army landed in England tomorrow, he would hot foot to join them & that a toast should be drunk to the Convention. Some told him to hush, & said there were probably spies among us. (I believe, however, that I am not suspected.) Wilde unrepentant.

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[9] Maurice Margarot, a prominent member of the LCS, was arrested in Edinburgh in December 1793; at his trial in January the following year he was found guilty of sedition and sentenced to fourteen years' transportation. JD.

Lynam stopped reporting in February 1794, but Wylde's name came up in a later report written by another government spy, James Powell. Powell's spelling and punctuation were no better than his predecessor's:

> Division 22, 1795, August the 9th
> Eleven new Members attended. Two members intoxicated and told to keep quiet or they would be sent away. A group talked of pikes and knives, but Wylde tho' vosiferous as usual, said nothing about drilling, only to suggest a dinner on 5th November in commemoration of Hardy's acquittal. In a conversation with him after the meeting I asked him about drilling he said the next drill was at Curtis's in his back room but to keep it quiet.

And later in the same report, Powell stated that:

> Richd. Turnbull is a Jacobin, a republican, a Thelwallite and almost certainly a deeist, perhaps even an atheist.

A remark which proved that Turnbull had, on returning from France in 1794, gone back to London and taken up membership of the Society again.

37.

The trial of Henri Jacques de Saint-Gilles, for High Treason
30th January 1813
VIII.

Mr Price cross-examined by Mr Fothergill.

Mr Fothergill:	Mr Price, there were found upon your person two letters which you said were of a personal nature. Would you care to elucidate?
John Price:	The first is a note from my tailor requesting the £14 7s 6d I owed him.
Mr Fothergill:	Your tailor being?

John Price: Mr Jeremy Francis.

Mr Fothergill: And the other?

John Price: It is a note from a friend.

Mr Fothergill: What is the name of this friend?

John Price: She does not sign her name.

Mr Fothergill: I have seen that she does not sign her name. Are we then to assume, that she has none?

John Price: I prefer not to mention it.

Mr Fothergill: Surely, Mr Price, there is nothing in your relationship with this lady which you would not want the court to hear?

John Price: Upon my oath, no! Our association was blameless.

Mr Fothergill: She writes begging you to wait upon on her at your earliest convenience, does she not?

John Price: She does.

Mr Fothergill: And the purpose of your attendance upon her?

John Price: She had lately inherited a sum of money from a relation in Lancashire. She required advice on how best to place it.

Mr Fothergill: And you furnished her with that advice?

John Price: I was to have done so. But I was apprehended in the meantime.

Mr Fothergill: Then, since your association with her was entirely innocent, let us hear her name. It is easy enough to infer it from the initials.

John Price: It is Lady Wray.

Mr Fothergill: Such an unfortunate lady! To be so deprived of such an adviser. Mr Price, can you explain why there was also found upon your person a blank passport issued by the French Republic?

John Price: I had been given it by the prisoner.

Mr Fothergill: For what purpose?

John Price: Had I continued my association with him, I was to have travelled to France on his behalf.

Mr Fothergill: For what reason?

John Price: I know not. He was to have explained to me the nature of the business but before that he was apprehended.

Mr Fothergill: He gave you a passport, yet had not told you what he wanted you to do with it? I find that strange.

John Price: It is so, nonetheless. I had forgotten I had the passport about me. I had hidden it in the pocket of my coat.

Mr Fothergill: Mr Price, you came to this country from the United States?

John Price: Yes.

Mr Fothergill: In what year?

John Price: In 1802.

Mr Fothergill: And for what reason?

John Price: My business had failed in America. I had an uncle living in London at that time, who wrote me to say I could live with him while I found employment, if I was willing to take responsibility for the running of his household. But he died before I arrived in England.

Mr Fothergill: Yet you still came?

John Price: He died while I was on the journey.

Mr Fothergill: Did you inherit from this uncle?

John Price: A hundred pounds only. He had a married daughter. Everything passed to her husband. But it was enough to set myself up a little.

Mr Fothergill: And you have remained in London since you arrived, in 1802, without leaving it at any time for France?

John Price: Yes.

Mr Fothergill: Yet we have heard you tell Mr Solicitor-General that you are fluent in the French language. The prisoner wrote you notes in French. You were to have travelled on his behalf in France, with the aid of a blank passport. That would imply, would it not, some familiarity with the country itself?

John Price: I came to England from America, as I said, in 1802. But, on finding upon my arrival in England that my uncle had died, and since I knew no one in this country, I set out for France. The Peace had been lately declared and many were flocking across the Channel. I thought maybe there would be more opportunity there than here.

Mr Fothergill: And would you care to tell us of your previous visit?

John Price: My previous visit?

Mr Fothergill: Come, Mr Price, do not be coy! It is a simple enough question.

John Price: It was a long time ago.

Mr Fothergill: And your memory is not good; that fact we understand. But it must have been a memorable time, must it not? Hardly one a man could forget.

John Price: It was a dreadful time. I found myself trapped in Paris and unable to escape. I was forced to remain in hiding until the trouble had blown over.

Mr Fothergill: By ‘trouble’ I presume you mean what we call the Terror?

John Price: I do.

Mr Fothergill: And could you elucidate for us, Mr Price, what had caused you to travel to Paris at that time?

John Price: I did not decide to travel at that time. I arrived earlier, before things had gotten nasty. The city was full of young men who wanted to experience the Revolution at first hand.

Mr Fothergill: And how did you live in Paris, while you were thus experiencing the Revolution?

John Price: I had friends there – American friends. I also undertook a little business.

Mr Fothergill: Of what nature?

John Price: Of the same nature as my business now. Buying and selling.

Mr Fothergill: And can you tell the court who your friends were in Paris?

John Price: The nature of my business led me to form many acquaintances. I knew several amongst the revolutionaries, such as Mons. Brissot and Mons. Vergniaud. I was also acquainted with Mrs Williams and Mr Morris. I often dined at White’s with Mr Paine.

Mr Fothergill: I remind you, Mr Price, that that scoundrel would still be under sentence of death in this country had he not obliged us by dying already.

John Price: I beg your pardon. I was acquainted also with Mr Barlow and Mr Imlay.

Mr Fothergill: And?

John Price: That is all I can remember.

Mr Fothergill: Are there not two others whom you also remember? Two men intimately connected with this case?

38.

When Julia stepped out of New Cross Gate station a biting sleet whipped her face and she realized she had a headache. She was looking forward to a hot shower, after which she'd sit in her pyjamas for an hour or two with a novel. God, what a day. She closed the door behind her and slumped in the armchair. The doorbell rang almost immediately. Please, not Miles. Give me a break.

'Katrina, hi.' She looked drained and tearful. 'Are you OK? I've not seen you for a while.'

'I know you've only just got in,' said Katrina, 'but can I come up and see you later? I need to talk to someone.'

'Give me thirty minutes; I've got to shower.'

Forty minutes later, Katrina sat on the sofa which one evening two or three months ago she'd upholstered in a rich blue fabric with tiny gold threads.

'I'm pregnant,' she said.

'Oh God. You won't want wine, then, will you? Orange juice?'

'No, it makes me feel sick.'

'Water? I've got some San Pell.'

'Thanks.'

'Should I congratulate or commiserate?'

'I'm not sure, really.'

'What will you do?' Julia sat down and put her feet up on the coffee table, then added, 'You know, I'm probably not the best person to talk to about this; I've no intention of ever getting pregnant.'

'But you're very calm. We can talk to you about anything. Actually, I think I want to keep it.'

'But?'

'But Max doesn't. So I'll have to decide between them.'

'What will you do if you keep it? What about your degree? Where would you live?'

'My mum lives in Wandsworth. I could move in with her.'

'Sounds frightful.'

‘Not really. We get on well. She’s not very old, for a mum; she was only nineteen when she had me. My dad walked out when I was three, so we’ve always been close. I could take a year or two out, then go back and finish my degree. It wouldn’t be easy. But three girls in the house together ...’

‘How do you know it’s going to be a girl?’

‘I just do. I never thought I’d feel like this – I always thought, if it came to it, I’d have an abortion. But it just feels like part of me. Does that sound stupid?’

‘I can’t imagine thinking like that. But it’s your decision.’

‘Do you think it’s irresponsible, bringing a child into the world?’

‘What, with global warming, international terrorism, the economic crisis and all that?’

‘I was thinking more in terms of not having any money, nowhere to live, no means of support. That’s what Max says.’

‘Do you think he’ll come round?’

‘No. He says he doesn’t want to be a father till he’s settled in a job, bought a flat. His parents don’t approve of me, either – so a “half-caste” grandchild, as they put it, isn’t going to go down very well.’

‘He should have thought about that beforehand, shouldn’t he?’

‘To be honest, I’m gutted. I can’t imagine being without him.’

The bell rang again. ‘I’m in demand tonight,’ said Julia. ‘Hi Tom. You must have heard the word wine.’

‘Yes please.’

‘I’ve got some cheese too; I presume that wouldn’t go amiss either?’

‘Have you ever known me refuse? I’ve not eaten tonight; my loan’s still not come through. But actually, I only came to see if Katy was OK.’

‘I’m pregnant.’

‘Bloody hell. How did that happen?’

‘Well, Tom, if you don’t know how it happens, I suggest you find out straight away before you land yourself in a load of trouble. You can’t play the eighteenth-century gentleman these days, you know.’

‘Very funny. Is this that Merlot I had last time? It was the nicest wine ever.’

‘No, it’s a Bordeaux I brought back from France. Someone gave it to me. Someone very rich and rather eccentric. It’s even nicer than the Merlot.’

‘New boyfriend, is he?’

‘He’s nearly seventy. And I’ve still got the old one.’

‘Well? You might be on to a good thing. What’s this cheese?’

‘Comtal.’

‘You eat so well, Julia. I suppose that’s because you work.’

‘It’s because I eat very little and buy everything on special offer.’

‘And get given fine wines by French men.’

‘That too. There has to be some perk attached to being a half-employed postgrad. with several thousand pounds of debt.’

‘We seem to have gatecrashed your evening,’ said Katrina. Have you been working today?’

‘I spent the morning in the British Library, which was hard work but fun. I’ve made some real progress in my research. Then, quite by chance, I met an old friend who took me home for lunch with his family. That was hard work and not fun.’

‘In what way?’

‘It was steamy and chaotic. And they’re very religious; “charismatic” is what they called it.’

‘I can’t imagine you being friends with people like that.’

‘He wasn’t like that before. It’s come out of the blue. He was at the RCM when I was an undergrad. A brilliant oboist, but volatile, very up and down. Got a job with the London Phil. I hadn’t seen him for years; and now he’s teaching music in a comprehensive in Hackney.’

‘What?’

‘Had some sort of breakdown, apparently. Now he’s born again, but the spark’s gone out of him.’

She hadn’t recognized the bearded man in the V-necked hand-knit who was calling out her name on the escalator at Euston. He’d kissed her on the cheek in a flurry of whisker and garlic, and somehow she’d allowed herself to be taken home for lunch. He’d put on weight and his unkempt beard gave him the look of a self-satisfied prophet. Six years ago he’d been wiry and thin, galvanized by an endless energy, always searching for something. Now his smile was patronising, avuncular.

‘Come in,’ he said, a hand on her shoulder. ‘Nina, darling,’ he called down the hall, ‘I’ve brought an old friend for lunch.’

Nina, whose shapeless brown dress billowed from her breasts to her knees, embraced Julia as if she’d known her for years.

‘Come through, I’m about to dish up.’ She swished a long plait off her shoulder and cleared from the table a pile of school exercise books, a baby’s rattle, a red plastic descant recorder and two apple cores. Something crunched under Julia’s shoes.

‘Do you still play the oboe?’ she asked.

‘Oh, yes. It’s a talent I bring to the school orchestra. When I’m not conducting. And I lead the church music group. Perhaps you’d like to come one Sunday? It’s very lively; you’d like it. We dance a lot.’

‘I don’t go to church,’ she said. But he didn’t hear her. ‘Kids,’ he was shouting, blowing on the recorder till it screamed in her ears, ‘lunch-time.’

Nina, her upper lip covered in a film of sweat, lifted a meat pie from the oven. A pan of mashed potato and a dish of cauliflower joined it. When they had sat down, Sebastian took one of Julia’s hands and Nathan, the eldest of the three children, took the other. They sat with bowed heads until Sebastian had said an extempore grace which lasted till the food had all but gone cold. Julia watched the youngest child squeeze mashed potato through her clenched fist into her mouth.

‘God’s been good to me,’ said Sebastian. ‘I don’t worry about my future any more. He’s got it all planned.’

‘I suppose if they’re happy,’ said Katrina, ‘it’s OK.’

‘It’s not for us to judge, is it?’ said Tom, through a mouthful of cheese. ‘I mean, it’s their choice.’

‘But I can’t help wondering,’ said Julia, ‘if he’ll wake up ten years from now and think, my God, what have I done? And then it’ll be too late. He’ll never be able to have a performing career now. And he was so talented.’

‘It’s an interesting alternative, isn’t it?’ said Tom. ‘Is it better to be a tortured genius, or a happy, satisfied nobody with no gifts and a conventional haircut?’

‘I do feel – I don’t know why – as if he’s sacrificed his musicianship for domestic happiness. As if he couldn’t have both.’

‘It’s probably difficult to have both,’ said Katrina. ‘A lot of really gifted people do have rather tortured personal lives.’

‘But is it a worthwhile sacrifice?’

‘Is the alternative a worthwhile sacrifice? Giving up children and a home life for a very demanding career?’

‘Any one of us might wake up in ten years’ time,’ said Tom, pouring more wine, ‘and realize we made the wrong decision. You might decide at forty that you want marriage and a family, I might decide I want to be a lawyer instead of a psychologist. Sometimes you can change tack, sometimes not.’

‘I suppose you’re right,’ said Julia. ‘Anyway, he cleared up the mystery music for me.’

‘What mystery music?’

‘I keep having this recurring dream which contains a piece of music.’

‘What sort of music?’

‘It’s a sarabande. And in the dream I know it’s a sarabande, but I didn’t think I knew the music. Sebastian told me straight away what it was.’

‘Only you, Julia, could have such an intellectual dream. When I dream, it’s about sex or essay deadlines.’

Later, as she stood in front of her bathroom mirror and brushed the red wine stains from her teeth, Julia replayed the dream in her mind. None of her dreams had ever been so vivid or so complete; they were invariably disjointed fragments. Even the recurring dream of the dead baby, her twin sister. But this one played itself out like a film; and now, as with a film watched repeatedly, she knew exactly what was going to happen.

Who was the masked man, the sardonic dance partner whose face putrefied at the end of the dance? She spat into the basin and stared at her own face in the mirror. Bags under her eyes; she wasn’t getting enough sleep. If it was someone she knew, as opposed to a random figment, there were two candidates. Richard Turnbull had worn his dark hair long for most of his life. He’d cut it in 1792, as many revolutionary sympathizers had done, but had grown it again afterwards and seemed to have worn it in the old style even when it was years out of fashion. Julia heard her mother’s voice: ‘Men with long hair; what is the world coming to?’ Nothing it’s not been before. Then there was Mathias Fournier. Strangely, the man in the dream seemed to bear more than a passing resemblance both to Fournier and to Richard Turnbull as she imagined him. Equally strange was the fact that in the dream she could never see, or never remember, the colour of the man’s eyes. Turnbull’s had been blue or blue-grey; Elizabeth Fitzroy, Manon de Saint-Gilles and William Montagu all agreed on this. Fournier’s, on the other hand, were an intense dark

brown, almost black, so that when you looked into them you felt you were plunging into depths you'd never be able to climb out of again.

She spat vehemently into the basin, rinsed out her mouth, looked in the mirror again. Such a stupid dream for a historian to have, so full of anachronism. Was she losing hold on reality? The masked man and, as far as she could remember, all the other dancers, were dressed in the fashion of the 1790s, but the musicians' clothes, like their music, dated from an earlier period, as if they'd been playing in that hall full of mirrors for forty or fifty years. And then there was the sarabande, endlessly repeating over and over, till that awful silence when her partner bowed to her. A dance from an earlier time. According to Sebastian, to whom she'd sung a few bars of the melody, that particular sarabande had been written by Handel in the first decade of the eighteenth century. A movement of a harpsichord suite. 'Although,' he'd said, 'Handel's theme wasn't original. It was based on a much older melody called "La Folia", which means madness.' Madness, indeed.

But the sarabande hadn't always had its baroque identity of stately poise and control, the ridiculous semi-balletic movements she found herself rehearsing in the dream. It had been banned in Spain in the sixteenth century, Sebastian had added, because of its wildness and its aggressive sexuality. 'I know the Inquisition got itself a bad name,' he'd said, closing the lid of the old piano with its sticky yellowed keys, 'but it had its heart in the right place. Music can be a dangerous thing; it can bring out so much of the chaos and anarchy inside us.'

Her visit to Sebastian's had depressed her; she'd been saddened by the contrast between the friend she had known and the man he was now, ensconced in the steamy chaos of family life. And to cap the lot, no coffee in the house. They'd offered her an ersatz 'with no nasties in it', but it was precisely the nasties she wanted. So, on an impulse, instead of changing trains at London Bridge, she'd carried on to Clapham Common. It was peaceful inside the Blue Teapot. No noise, no children. She felt almost relieved to see Peter Marchmont in his black apron, as if she'd returned to a world she felt at home in.

'No cake today?' he said as she ordered a large cappuccino.

'No, I've just had a very stodgy lunch. Not like your cooking at all.' The wholemeal pastry had been dense and hard, the cauliflower overcooked.

'I'm flattered. I'll give you a piece to take home.'

On the way home, steadying the small cardboard box on her knee, she'd wondered how she could feel more comfortable with Marchmont, who was creepy and possibly delusional, than with Sebastian, one of her oldest and dearest friends, who by his own account had at last found happiness. Somehow, she'd warmed to Marchmont. It wasn't that she trusted him; no way. But, beneath his uncompromising certainty, there was something vulnerable about him. And at least he shared her passion for the past. So she'd taken to calling in at the Blue Teapot on her way home from work some nights, even though it was out of her way. The small café was conducive to thought.

But there was also, she realized as the train drew in to New Cross Gate in the dark and wet, an element of perverseness to her behaviour. It was two fingers up to Miles, whose interference she resented; perhaps she now felt a solidarity with Peter Marchmont. It would be strange, she thought, if the three of them ended up in the Blue Teapot one day.

She woke in the small hours, unsure of the time. The street was still quiet. She burrowed her head into the pillow, lay still and closed her eyes, but couldn't get back to sleep. Her phone said two minutes past five.

The dream hadn't come again. There had been others, indistinct and forgotten now. Throwing off the quilt, she put on an old baggy jumper over her pyjamas and made a pot of coffee, which she carried to her desk with a large cup and a jug of warmed milk. There were crumbs of cheese and bread on the floor from last night; they'd have to stay there. What day was it? Tuesday; she'd give the floors a once-over when she got in from work, do some tidying up, pour some bleach down the toilet. She'd still have three hours or so at her desk.

Such rotten luck for Katrina. Such a life-changing experience. In Julia's book, children were noisy little brats who ran about and shrieked and got food on their faces and made your quiet meal in a restaurant or your mid-afternoon shopping trip a misery. She wondered nonetheless what it might be like to hold a daughter by the hand and look up at the Diplodochus in the Natural History Museum, or to sit side-by-side on winter evenings reading books together.

She cradled the coffee cup in her hands, draining it of its warmth, tracing its irregular rim with the tip of her finger. It was one of a pair she'd bought just before Christmas in a kitchen shop off Tottenham Court Road, off-white and asymmetric. Then, the coffee finished, she looked down at the document on her desk: a photocopy

from Richard Turnbull's journal which she intended to give to Peter Marchmont at their next meeting. A document which described in no uncertain terms Henri de Saint-Gilles's political convictions in the 1790s and which seemed to put a spanner in the works of Marchmont's theory that Saint-Gilles had turned against the Revolution.

Conversation with SG: Paris, March 1793. One evening in his rooms, after we had returned from the Jacobins. I asked him how he came to be a supporter of the Revolution. He poured out wine for both of us and put his feet up on the chair opposite. His boots: old leather, but good; black and well looked-after.

— I always, even as a boy, had a keen sense of justice. And one year when I was at Ruffec in the summer, a neighbour of ours gave me some books which captured my imagination, opened my eyes to the reality of life in France. Not the France I had known and lived in, but the other. That of the majority of her population. I read them all. Rousseau, Volney, d'Holbach, Voltaire.

— Surely you were not converted to the revolutionary cause by your reading alone?

— No, although I might have been. The neighbour, whose name was Hébert, also talked to me. We spent whole afternoons discussing politics, the wrongs of absolute monarchy, the natural rights of the people. One day he took me to a nearby village (Ansac, Ambernac? I no longer remember; so long ago, now) to see for myself the way the wretches lived. An accident of birth which decided these things, he said. Only that. Which side of a wall you are born on. When my father found out about the seditious books, however, he forbade me ever to see M. Hébert again.

He poured more wine and said, But then there was Figaro.

— Figaro?

— The play. Beaumarchais' *Mariage de Figaro*. Once, when Father was from home (our mother was often ill and kept her room) I got some friends together and staged a production of it. We erected a stage in the ballroom, had costumes made by a seamstress. I played Figaro. I was Figaro.

— What would your father have said if he had found out?

— He did, and at first he was furious. But my justification was this: if the play had been shown at court, then it could be shown also at Ruffec. He could not answer that.

(I heard a rumour that the queen had enjoyed this play. Can this be true? Was she then as stupid as she was reputed to be?)

Talking thus about himself, SG became animated; his wine glass in his left hand, he threw his right into the air as if he was once more upon the stage. On the calling of the Estates-General, he said, his father took lodgings at Versailles. He hoped to gain an introduction to the King and Queen. (They were not of the first rank of nobility, not high enough to serve at court. But nobility nonetheless, and far from that poverty-stricken sort that had only name and lineage to cling to.)

— But when the news came of the taking of the Bastille, I rode back to Paris as fast as I could, without my father's permission. Our hotel was on the rue de Richelieu, not far from the Palais-Royal. I had no idea what I would do; I merely wanted to be there, to see the old régime crumble. They were wonderful days, he said, standing up and fetching a pipe from the mantelshelf.

— And what of your father? I asked.

— He has returned to Ruffec with my sisters. He is a coward; even before Capet was executed, he thought the Revolution a criminal thing, wanted nothing to do with it. All revolutionaries, he says, are traitors to the patrie and deserve execution. And not the humane sort offered by the guillotine.

— And you? What is your opinion of Louis's execution?

— It was the only recourse. He was king as well as man and the monarchy must be put to death. They must all die – queen and children too. The Bourbon curse must be eradicated. Bloodshed is the only way to cleanse the country, so it might start afresh. But my father refuses to accept that the time of the monarchy is over. He dislikes change.

— How many sisters have you?

— Two. Manon, who is older than I, would dearly have loved to stay in Paris, but my father forbade it. He is right, of course; Paris is no place for a woman of aristocratic background. But she is bored in the country and thinks the revolution will afford her some excitement.

I asked him if he did not fear on his own account. At that he banged his fist on the table, stood up and paced about the room.

— I have given myself heart and soul to the Revolution. It is my destiny. I have repudiated my aristocratic background, have given what wealth is mine to the Patrie! Can a man not be forgiven his birth? If you had been born into a family of thieves and yet never stole a thing, would that make you a thief?

— Yet many ex-aristos are viewed with suspicion.

— And rightly so. Take Egalité – everyone knows he is only after the throne – and even men like Condorcet still live in luxury. Others have merely turned their

allegiance in order to save their skins. But I have given up everything – everything! You see how I live! I have no more wealth than you.

— And your sister? Manon?

— She wants only an escape from the tedium of her present existence. She might give up her carriage, because she likes to walk and likes to shock by walking everywhere; but she would be reluctant to give up her privacy, her library. She is in love with a notion, not with the revolution itself. She lacks the good sense of Mlle Breuil.

— Yet even deep in the country, there is danger, is there not?

— Danger is everywhere. If it were up to me, Ruffec would be handed over to the patrie tomorrow. But the château belongs to my father, and he is an old man, and frail. The revolution is not heartless. My position is known.

I liked this man. His enthusiasm reflected mine; we were well matched. Yet he revealed to me – as I to him – only glimpses of the true man. Was he, like me, engaged in a clandestine task? We who were similar in many ways, were similar perhaps also in this.

Later – in that hellish time – he admitted that he had worked for the National Assembly and the Convention. He kept a watchful eye on the foreigners still in Paris, and sent men to Ruffec to gather information amongst the landowners and the country people alike. Some of these men would stay at his château, making their base there while they carried out their duties. (Thus it was that my own arrival in that place aroused no suspicion. I had merely to say to Monsieur de Saint-Gilles père that I had been sent by Henri, and he assumed I was one of that flow of visitors, of whose real business he was ignorant, but who, his son had persuaded him, were a necessary evil in the preservation of the peace at Ruffec.)

Did he have dealings also with the Committee of Public Safety? This I do not know – I did not ask.

A line was drawn under the last paragraph; the next entry was a list of expenditure for the first half of July 1812. And that was the end of the section written in English. Julia flipped through the rest of the journal. Staring at the pages of Greek script, which were as untidily written as the English ones, she was tempted to believe they contained the secrets she wished so much to uncover, but how likely was that? The fragmentary and haphazard nature of Turnbull's English narratives was infuriating;

there was no reason the Greek ones should be any different. What else had he got up to during his stay in London? And why was he going back over his early life when he had just been taken on to flush out a French spy? She would have to see about getting a translator. But it would mean sharing the notebook, exposing it to another's scrutiny; it was for that reason she had put it off. She closed the book gently, tidied her desk and went to shower.

39.

'The letters I gave you last time were of interest to you, I hope,' said Peter Marchmont as Julia placed a pint of Young's in front of him. Since her discovery of his real name they had stopped meeting at the Spanish Galleon. It had seemed appropriate, somehow; a new phase to their relationship. She had suggested Starbucks in Clapham High Street, but he'd pulled a face – did he look like the sort of man who would frequent the chains? – and they'd settled on the Windmill on the Common.

'Yes,' she said, looking round, half expecting to see Miles skulking in a corner. Her life seemed to have taken on the trappings of a cheap spy story. She took a sip of her coffee.

'Not as good as mine, is it?' he said with a smile. 'The coffee.'

'No. Definitely not as good as yours.'

'A notebook has come to light.'

'What sort of notebook?'

'One written by Richard Turnbull. I'm working through it. Part of it seems to deal with that period of Turnbull's life which is so shrouded in mystery: the contentious episode of 1812 and 1813. The episode on which you and I, Miss Dalton, have a difference of opinion.'

She frowned. 'A journal?'

'It seems to be more a collection of notes for Turnbull's projected autobiography. Though there are some substantial passages in it. It starts with his return to London in 1825, but the accounts jump about. Presumably he intended to put it into chronological order later on.'

‘That always seems to have been his intention, though he never achieved it, did he? What does it say about the 1813 episode?’

‘As far as I can tell, it’s not what you want to hear.’

‘So tell me.’

‘In a roundabout way, it’s a confession. Of sorts.’

‘A confession of what?’

‘Well. Of being the spy. Of framing Saint-Gilles.’

‘What, just like that?’

‘No, not just like that. He doesn’t say, “I was the spy and I let Saint-Gilles go to the gallows instead of me.” That would be very unsubtle. Of course, I’ve not finished it yet, but it seems to point in that direction. To give a whiff.’

‘I’d very much like to see it.’

‘And I’d very much like you to look at it; I’d appreciate your professional opinion. I’ll let you know as soon as I’ve finished it. It could change the way we both look at Turnbull. Though there is evidence in his other writings of what you’re so reluctant to accept.’

‘Like what?’

‘Like the letter in which he exclaims in February 1813, “May God forgive me, Judas! I have betrayed a friend!” I think I passed that one on to you, did I not?’

‘Yes, I’ve seen it. But it’s not conclusive. It’s an emotional outburst and could simply have to do with the fact that the spy he’d been employed to unearth turned out to be his friend. It can’t be taken as evidence of any deeper betrayal.’

‘But it could point to that, surely?’

‘Yes, I grant you that. The words on the page could have been written by a man who’d let his friend go to the gallows in his place. But that proves nothing. Both scenarios fit the words.’

‘What would it take to convince you of Richard Turnbull’s treachery?’

‘Either something hard-and-fast – which is unlikely to turn up, given that people don’t tend to broadcast the fact that they’re spies or traitors – or an accumulation of circumstantial evidence. I’d quite happily change my position if I thought the evidence warranted it. As it is, I think it’s equivocal. But I could ask the same of you: what would it take to convince you that Turnbull wasn’t a traitor?’

‘Well, that’s like asking me what it would take to convince me that the sun doesn’t shine.’

‘Exactly. You’re convinced you’re right. You’ve made up your mind in advance and I don’t think there’s any evidence that would shift you from that position. Am I right?’

He smiled. ‘Maybe, maybe not. But we’ll see.’

She passed him an envelope. ‘Strangely enough, I’ve also come across a notebook of Richard Turnbull’s. Those are some copies from it. One of the entries seems to suggest that, not only was Saint-Gilles for the Revolution, but that he acted as an informant for the National Convention.’

‘A document written by Turnbull?’

‘Yes.’

‘So quite possibly a piece of self-justification. To make it look as though Saint-Gilles had been a spy all along.’

‘But you can’t just dismiss everything you don’t like as a fiction.’

‘Can you prove it isn’t?’

‘No; and I’m quite prepared to allow for the fact that Richard Turnbull’s accounts may be biased. But I’m also saying that we have to keep an open mind and take the evidence on balance. Can you prove your notebook isn’t a fiction? Where did you find it, by the way?’

‘In a second-hand bookshop off the Charing Cross Road. Got it for next to nothing. I keep my eyes open, scour the bookshops regularly. But I suppose it was the find of a lifetime.’

‘You found an early-nineteenth-century manuscript in a second-hand bookshop?’

‘It was almost … As I said, the find of a lifetime.’

‘Are you going to publish your findings?’

‘I leave that to the likes of you, Miss Dalton. My concern is only to establish the truth about Henri de Saint-Gilles.’

‘Because he was your ancestor?’

‘Yes. I told you that last time.’

‘But Rosine’s child was ...’

‘Was what?’

She took a mouthful of coffee. ‘Illegitimate.’

‘What difference does that make? He was still Henri’s nephew.’

‘Yes, I suppose he was. Do you know anything about Raoul’s father?’

‘No – and to be honest, I’m not that interested. It’s the Saint-Gilles line which is my concern. You know about the family, then?’

‘I went to the family château over the summer.’

‘In Ruffec?’

‘It’s somewhat misleading; it’s not actually in the village called Ruffec, but a bit further south; it just happens to have the same name. As far as we could tell, Raoul was the only survivor of that branch of the family. Though we found nothing about his descendants. Nor, I have to admit, about the date of his death.’

‘We? Have you got someone else involved in this?’

‘Just a French friend who traced the château and drove me there. It’s still lived in, you know; in fact, that’s where we stayed. With the comtesse Ghislaine de Montauban, the current owner. Her husband was a descendant of the Saint-Gilles family; so she must also be a very distant relative of yours.’

He waved his arm. ‘Well, I’m not really so interested in family trees and all that.’

‘Yet it seems to mean a great deal to you.’

‘It’s my relationship with Saint-Gilles which is important. Not the process by which it became known.’

‘Your relationship with Saint-Gilles?’

‘Metaphorically speaking, of course. Anyway, I have here a few miscellaneous documents which might interest you until I’ve finished the notebook. Give me a month, six weeks, perhaps. I’ll email you, OK?’

Once again, she reflected on her way to the tube station, she’d stopped short of disabusing him about the fact of Raoul de Saint-Gilles’s parentage. Was that because she was reluctant to impart such a distressing piece of information, or because she wanted to stay one step ahead of him? She wasn’t sure.

When she got home, she looked through the envelope Marchmont had given her. Four documents, three of them substantial. The first, Marchmont had noted in pencil on the photocopy, had been written by Richard Turnbull in the endpapers of a copy of Paine’s *Rights of Man* which had ended up in the collection of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society. It was undated.

> My father once told me of a picture he had seen in his youth, at the house of a friend of my grandfather’s. After dinner one day, the guests had gathered in the drawing-

room, where their host, a Mr Blenkinsop, had got together some amusements based on the new-fangled electricity. My father's favourite amongst these games required the guests to stand in a circle; they were instructed to hold hands and through them was then passed the charge from a Leyden jar controlled by Mr Blenkinsop. As it passed through each body, it caused that person to leap high in the air. ('But,' my father confessed to me; 'it was not the electric shock or the leap which moved me most, but the fact that I was hand-in-hand with Sara Blenkinsop, whom at that time I loved more than any of her sex.') To round off the evening's entertainment, Mr Blenkinsop had procured a picture of the King, which he had hung upon the wall, and challenged any of his guests to try and divest His Majesty of his crown. My father, exhilarated by his experience of the electric force and emboldened by his proximity to Sara, said he would be the first to try. ('For even then,' he would say each time he recounted the tale, 'I was an Antimonarchist, full of Voltaire and the Levellers'). But, to Mr Blenkinsop's gratification and the amusement of all the company, as soon as he reached out to touch the crown, he was given a forceful shock – the frame of the picture having been equipped with wires for that purpose. Mr Blenkinsop then issued a stern warning to my father – whose pride was wounded more than his fingers – that the experience should act as a lesson upon the dire consequences of trying to topple the Crown of Majesty. And that, I have since often thought, is the way in which our world is constructed. Both Church and King rigged up with a force so strong that it is impossible to make any assault upon them.

A strange Phenomenon, this electricity. A fluid which, it appears, works by the interplay of positive and negative; which can both heal and kill. And two of its greatest pioneers were also supporters of revolutions, modern men who stood against old corruption and old nonsense. I mean Dr Franklin and Dr Priestley.

If Richard Turnbull had been a radical – and that was the way the evidence seemed to be pointing – why had he become a government man in 1812? Had he simply turned his back on his earlier convictions, as so many had, Wordsworth and Coleridge included, or was the situation more complex than that? If Lord Alexander's information was correct, and Turnbull had worked for Pitt's government in the 1790s, it was possible that he had been a double agent. But which side had he worked for?

40.

The trial of Henri Jacques de Saint-Gilles, for High Treason

30th January 1813

IX.

Mr Fothergill: Mr Price, I asked you if there were not two men with whom you were acquainted in Paris. It cannot be so difficult a question.

John Price: I was acquainted with both the prisoner and his accuser.

Mr Fothergill: With Mons. de Saint-Gilles and Mr Turnbull?

John Price: That is correct.

Mr Fothergill: So it comes out. And what was the nature of your acquaintance with them?

John Price: We were acquaintances, that is all. We knew each other.

Mr Fothergill: Mr Price, I may be assumed to understand the meaning of the words I use, without the need to have them glossed. Were you working for Mons. de Saint-Gilles at that time?

John Price: No, I did not work for him.

Mr Fothergill: What was the nature of his business in Paris?

John Price: He took part in debates at the Jacobins; attended the sessions of the Convention at the Manège. He wrote for news-papers. Beyond that, I know nothing of his business.

Mr Fothergill: And what of your relationship with Mr Turnbull?

John Price: He was a friend. We were young men.

Mr Fothergill: Your ability to state the obvious, Mr Price, is beginning to vex me. How would you describe Mr Turnbull's attitude to the Revolution in France?

John Price: He was an enthusiast.

Mr Fothergill: How much of an enthusiast?

John Price He was wholeheartedly in favour of it. He ran through the streets shouting *Liberté, Egalité, ou la mort.*

Mr Fothergill: Liberty, Equality, or Death! Is that so? Our government man once ran through the streets of Paris proclaiming a dangerous revolutionary slogan. Well, well. And what was Mr Turnbull's business in Paris?

John Price: Much the same as that of the prisoner. He observed the events of the day. He wrote a little for the news-papers.

Mr Fothergill: But he must have had a specific purpose in being there?

John Price: As far as I know, merely to view the workings of the Revolution.

Mr Fothergill: You were not close, in that case?

John Price: Not as close as all that; and, besides, after a while, people became more guarded. One came to live in fear of an accusation.

Mr Fothergill: So you know nothing of Mr Turnbull's business in Paris during the Revolution?

John Price: I do not.

Mr Fothergill: When did you leave Paris?

John Price: In August of 1794. The city sickened me. I returned to my own country. I remained there until 1801, when I received my uncle's letter.

Mr Fothergill: And what did you do in France during your second visit in 1802?

John Price: Very little. There were few openings for business. I returned to England and set up my business here.

Mr Fothergill: By that you mean your shop in Chandos-street?

John Price: Yes. I sell books and maps and prints.

Mr Fothergill: But not you, exactly?

John Price: No. I leave the shop in the charge of my partner, Mr George Hargreaves.

Mr Fothergill: So Mr Hargreaves looks after your shop while you are out on business?

John Price: Yes.

Mr Fothergill: Can you explain what sort of business takes you to the south coast?

John Price: The same.

Mr Fothergill: Might you be more specific?

John Price: I buy articles – collections of prints, books from libraries left by gentlemen and ladies who have died or fallen on hard times.

Mr Fothergill: And you indulge in a little spying at the same time?

John Price: I did not spy myself. I have said that.

Mr Fothergill: Yet you have admitted that you employed two or three men to spy for you. Is that any different from spying yourself?

John Price: I suppose not.

Mr Fothergill: You suppose not. In fact the effect is increased, is it not?

John Price: Perhaps. Possibly.

Mr Fothergill: Perhaps and possibly. The mathematics are clear. Two or three men can gather two or three times the information that one man may gather alone. Information which would have been of material detriment to this country; a country which had nurtured you, as you claim, since the year 1802. Is that not so?

John Price: That the information was detrimental, or that this country nurtured me?

Mr Fothergill: I would ask you not to become impudent with me, Mr Price; it is not in your best interests.

John Price: I beg your pardon.

Mr Fothergill: You will answer the question. Would not the intelligence you gathered have been of material detriment to this country?

John Price: Yes.

Mr Fothergill: Well, I think we begin to see what sort of a man you are, Mr Price. You have admitted to spying, supposedly on behalf of the prisoner. You have admitted being a friend of revolutionaries. I would doubt that it is possible for us to establish that a single word of what you say is true.

John Price: I admit that I have made some serious mistakes. But I had not thought that it was to be I who was to be tried here today, but the prisoner.

Mr Fothergill: The prisoner, your erstwhile employer! A man with whom you not only conspired to break the laws of this country, but whom you subsequently betrayed.

John Price: It is true I have spied for the French; but I do that no longer.

Mr Fothergill: No, because you were dissatisfied with the terms. We do not misrecognize financial discontent for conscience, Mr Price. And can we be sure that you were not a spy on two counts, playing all along a greater game than that of which the prisoner is accused? Sending to the United States the same information and for an additional sum of money, that was sent on your behalf to France. What do you say to that?

John Price: That Britain was but lately at war with my country; I should have had no cause to send intelligence to the United States.

Mr Fothergill: Come, sir; you know as well as I, that the gathering of such information does not begin with a war; there are webs of intelligence in operation long before. How do we know that, at the

same time that your men were gathering information for the prisoner, they were not also gathering intelligence of use to your compatriots?

John Price: Because I was not. That is the truth; you have my word as a gentleman.

Mr Fothergill: It is possible that you and I, Mr Price, might disagree over the definition of the word ‘gentleman’. However, I would ask, and I would ask the gentlemen of the jury to consider, whether we may believe without nervousness the testimony of a man who has made his dwelling in the murkiest shadows; who clothes himself in deceit as in a cloak; a man who thinks nothing of betraying his adoptive country, of committing treason against his adoptive king, and then – for no other reason than that he is dissatisfied with the terms, and is backed into a corner – betrays his erstwhile accomplice by turning King’s Evidence. Even when you know a truth, do you know whose truth it is you are telling?

John Price: That is all lies.

Mr Fothergill: All lies but not provable as such. But no matter. Perhaps we might encounter you as ambassador one day. That is all, Mr Price; thank you.

41.

The high mosquito whine of her phone pulled her abruptly out of her reverie. She checked the display.

‘Mathias, salut.’

‘Hi, Julia,’ he said in English. ‘Am I disturbing you?’

‘No. It’s good to hear from you. How are you?’

‘Horribly busy. I’ve got three postgrads this year, and still six hours of teaching a week.’

‘That much? They push you hard, don’t they?’

‘Do I detect a note of sarcasm, Julia?’

‘I’m afraid so. I have twelve hours of teaching on a three-day contract at the Academy.’

‘Perhaps you should think about getting a job in France when you’ve finished your thesis.’

‘Nice work if I could get it. And I’ve got to finish the thing first. I’m trapped in it, like a character in a fairy tale. I know I’ve got to get out of it, but part of me doesn’t really want to.’

‘I have every confidence in its success. Did my uncle mention Carmen Broussard?’

‘Yes, he did. Said she was a recluse.’

‘Well, that’s a little hyperbolic. She rang me two days ago.’

‘She rang you? Jean-Michel said she never used the phone. You know I wrote to her about the Saint-Gilles family? She’ll think I’m an idiot.’

‘She’ll probably revise her opinion once she’s met you. She has something which might be of interest to you. I gave her your number – I hope you don’t mind?’

‘Not at all.’

‘But I said I’d ring you myself. She knows the whereabouts of some papers written by Manon de Saint-Gilles and thought they might be relevant to your research.’

‘Ha. Just when I’d told myself I ought to stop chasing after sources and concentrate on what I’ve got.’

‘So you don’t want to come and see them?’ She caught the inflection of disappointment in his voice, smiled at the eyeless face of Isaac Newton above her desk and reached for her diary.

‘Of course I want to see them. If I arrange my trip for the right week, can I attend the Society of the Fifteenth of December?’

‘Sure thing. Jean-Michel would love to see you.’

‘That’s very American, you know.’

‘What?’

‘What you just said. “Sure thing.” ’

‘Do you have a problem with that?’

‘No; it just sounds odd, that’s all. With a French accent.’

‘I spent some time in the States a few years ago. I had a fellowship at Princeton.’

‘Lucky you. Not that I’d want to live in the States.’

‘Why ever not?’

‘It just doesn’t appeal to me.’

*

The trouble with phone calls, she thought, as she stared at the papers on her desk, is that they distract you. Even the welcome ones. Especially the welcome ones. She'd lost her concentration. Switching on her laptop, she opened the spreadsheet on which she kept a record of her accounts. It was all very well saying she'd go to Paris again, but did she have the money to get there? A few hundred pounds in her savings account, but she had to pay her parents back the two thousand pounds she'd borrowed last March. Borrowed under false pretences. She'd have to explain to them before Clarissa's wedding that 'Patrick' was now out of the picture, otherwise her mother would spread it about that it would be Julia's turn next to be walking up the aisle. She wished she'd not told the lie in the first place. Fournier didn't know the half of it. But she had, perhaps, been a little mad back then; she'd had to have those documents, at any cost; and now she had to deal with the fall-out from that decision. It seemed, however, that the most important document she'd brought away from Bank House was the one she hadn't exactly paid for: the journal which, in a strict sense, she had stolen. Did the fact that she'd paid £1500 for the other documents soften that act into something less than theft?

The spreadsheet told her that, if she put no money aside this month and cut down on coffees and meals out, she would have £326.19 for a trip to Paris to meet Carmen Broussard, peruse Manon de Saint-Gilles's papers and attend a meeting of the Society of the Fifteenth of December. Not quite enough; she'd have to dip into the money she'd put aside and start saving again next month. If she could pay her parents back in the next year or so, she'd only have her student loan to worry about. Another five years and she might be debt-free. She'd be thirty-four by then. She shut down the Excel file, closed the laptop and turned her attention to the second of the documents Peter Marchmont had given her.

> Cambridge, January 1835. Twenty-two years – I reckon time from that event which in French I call my *débâcle* – an uncontrollable flood which tore apart the structures of my life, sweeping me and those close to me before it. But to which event do I refer? – the catastrophe of 1813 had its roots in another, separated from it by twenty years. Difficult to distinguish the threads of cause and effect. Paris, 1794; London, 1813: they circle in my mind; a personal revolution, an inexorable wheel of punishment.

Revolutions. Things come back to where they started. Change is slow – like the course of the rocks, infinitesimal from year to year – so that in the span of a human life, which thus compared is very short, progress appears non-existent.[10]

A great thunderstorm, from which I have taken shelter at the coaching inn. Rain lashing down in columns; on and on; sheets of lightning which spark a furious luminosity into the dull light of now – a blue-edged light which for a split second, as if it were a messenger from another world, cuts across the obscurity of this one. Raindrops scattered from the sodden leaves and branches seep into the earth; twigs and stones and filth gush along the rutted footpaths.

Lightning – a manifestation of electricity, the same which can spark into a corpse the appearance of life, perhaps even the vital force itself. But a flash of illumination also – violent and temporary – which changes what we perceive. I long for such enlightenment in the dark room of my life.

It causes me no fear, this raging of Nature, a violence done to itself and – since we are part of Nature – to us also. It offers a relief of sorts; assuages, temporarily, a rage of my own. The fury of youth is soon spent, and men in middle or old age are often so little recognizable as their former selves that they seem to be another entirely. But my own fury remains – different, perhaps; simmering rather than boiling; a fire subdued but never put out. A fury of impotence, certainly: what, after all, have I achieved? I have squandered my life in skirmishes far from the centre of battle.

I am a mismatch, out of joint with myself and with the time I live in; a dislocated knee or shoulder which grinds in pain against its surroundings. I find consolation in the thought of a Nature which turns and thunders against itself – as if it understood that things had turned out false and back to front and upside down.

I lately made the acquaintance of a man both like and unlike myself: an itinerant polyglot, a Welshman whose facility with languages is, if possible, greater than my own. He also is Richard, with dark hair like my own; but a man of such guileless simplicity, that it is difficult to conceive that the same Nature could have framed us both. We walked together the ten miles to the house of Sir Watkin Williams Wynn at Ruabon, where we were told that Sir W. was from home; the housekeeper, disdainful

[10] Turnbull had perhaps read Charles Lyell's recently-published *Principles of Geology* (1830-1833) which showed that geological processes follow consistent laws involving slow and infinitesimal changes. JD.

of the two dishevelled, ruffian-like creatures who stood on her doorstep, bade us be gone with speed. My namesake argued that Sir Watkin invited him often to his table, but to no avail, and thus we were obliged to trudge another six miles or so to the inn at Wrexham.

Could I have been a man such as this, a simple wanderer, ingenuous and untainted?

I am, it seems, incapable of turning away from the past. It gnaws at me, year by year; one day it will devour me. Though it is a heavy price to pay, death alone perhaps – the annihilation and negation of consciousness – will rid me of this burden. It is also possible, that the setting down of those terrible events into some sort of coherent account might assuage their pain. It is for that that I write these notes – for my own remedy – not to justify myself but as an attempt to impose an order upon events. To be read by another only after my death.

The storm recedes now; a watery white sun, low in the sky, washes the landscape; the thunder rumbles over a distant village and I feel as if I have been – for a fleeting moment – purged of something.

Autobiographical notes

March 1793 – tossed upon the Channel in a mean little vessel, midway between the land I had left and that to which I had turned. Cast loose, between destinies. Upon the sea I was nowhere; I could have forgotten all that had led to my departure from England. What might my life have become, if I had not taken that decision?

But I longed to reach that new-fledged state in which, like so many of my contemporaries, I had placed such hope; the culmination of my dreams and aspirations, the place for which I was born.

Left Dover at first light – with the tide – arrived at Calais some time after noon. My first taste of sea-sickness. A sort of waking dream – horrible – condemned to remain upon the sea for ever – never arriving, always short of my destination. – I grew old, white-haired, feebly staring out at the waves while those around me disembarked at one port or another and went about their business. Pulled out of the dream by one of my fellow-passengers who, missing his footing on the deck, hurtled against me and woke me.

From Calais immediately by diligence to Paris. Riding outside. My companion – the same young man who had knocked against me on the boat – introduced himself as Henri Saint-Gilles.

(The rôle of chance in this affair.)

First sight of Paris: dawn light, a pink glow suffusing the top storeys of the buildings. A bride on her wedding day. Nothing could diminish my elation; not the harsh shouts in the unfamiliar vernacular, the rough search to which we were subjected at the City Gate by citizen soldiers (who thrust their naked bayonets into the sacks of vegetables in the cart ahead of us); nor even the sight of ragged and emaciated sansculottes, their look of fear or guarded scepticism.

I passed for a Frenchman – rode through the city gates that morning as Monsieur A., a book-seller.

(I had early shown an aptitude for languages. Long have I been able to mimic, to replicate, the sounds and inflexions of another's voice, and thus as it were become another. By the age of seven I had learnt the rudiments of French and German, Greek and Latin. My father sent me for lessons in French and German to a Frenchwoman who lived in Hanover-street. Madame d'Holbach had married a Manchester merchant and settled with him some years before the Revolution. She was now a widow and glad enough, both of the income my lessons afforded her and the opportunity to speak her own language. I was a quick pupil and after two or three years she declared that I spoke like a Frenchman – my only accent being the one which I had picked up from her, she being a native of Alsace. Though I continued my lessons after my mother's death, our subsequent departure from Manchester put a stop to them. My father being much reduced in circumstances, I continued my studies from the books in his library. He had sold much of our furniture, along with what remained of his equipment, but he would rather have died on the gallows, he said, than to have sold his books. Mme d'Holbach allowed me to visit her in Manchester several times a year to converse with her for an afternoon at no cost. Father could at times ill afford even the coach fare, but wished me to retain my facility with the languages. I often walked some or – in the summer months – all of the distance, thus lessening the expense. This saddened my poor father, who wanted above all to provide for me; but it was thus that I discovered my penchant for walking and the benefits it conferred. – Mme d'Holbach also taught me a little Italian; so that by the time my father sent me to London in 1791, I was

fluent in French, German and Italian, but could also read and write Greek, Latin and Hebrew.

– I digress, however. I often do not write upon the subject I have set myself, finding others – a natural train of thought – more congenial once pen meets paper.)

He digresses also, thought Julia, when he starts to touch on the heart of the matter; the sensitive, secret episodes. As if he can't bring himself to face the events; as if he can only glance at them, quickly and obliquely. She read on.

But Monsieur A. constructed himself piecemeal. – Although I held government papers and a passport, I hardly stopped to create for myself an identity from these bare details; with the confidence of the young, I relied on my ability to think extempore if questioned, to remember with total accuracy the details I had invented.

(My course of action not clearly set out – instructed only to travel to Paris and to wait until called upon. I had a room above the bookshop, off the rue de Varenne, on the left bank of the river. M. Joliot, its owner, lived on the first floor, but – business being bad and many destitute – let out the rooms above. My neighbours – and others of the section du Bonnet-Rouge – I met in the queue for bread the next morning. Guarded in their conversation – they perhaps feared I was an informant.)

That evening, to the Jacobins. Robespierre: a small, neat, precise man, got up in the old-fashioned clothes of the ancien régime – powdered wig & buckled shoes. It is difficult to remember exactly what I thought of him then, the picture being so coloured by what came later – for ever now marked by the concepts of Tyrant and Terror. He warned against the traitors who lurked within the Republic, in the streets of Paris itself; and urged his fellow-revolutionaries to be prepared to die for the Republic and the Revolution, as he himself was prepared to die for their sake.

The naivety with which I had arrived in Paris soon dispelled. – I had thought the Revolution a single entity which would march steadfast and unwavering to its fulfilment, overturning privilege and poverty along its way. Ill-prepared for the bitter divisions amongst the factions, the still glaring inequalities, the near-starvation of some (the poorest).

> Such an assortment of characters thrown together in the management of the Revolution! Of all the orators I heard, Danton was the most impressive. A man who understood the people, a mixture of both human warmth and human failings. He died with dignity, with defiance – his execution in April of the following year moved me more than any other save that one. (I was in the crowd on the quai du Louvre as the tumbrels passed.)
>
> – How narrowly, perhaps, I avoided that same death – though it meant nothing to me then. How eagerly I would have bared my neck to the blade, if it could have … [11]
>
> Saint-Gilles also at the Jacobins that first evening – he attended every meeting, a fervent supporter. (Later, I also attended the Feuillants and the Cordeliers.) He introduced me to several of his acquaintance, invited me to return with him to his lodging in the section des Piques, served me a glass of wine and we talked long into the night. He had been in Paris, off and on, since the start of the Revolution in the summer of '89, and thus knew more of the situation than I; over many subsequent nights he explained to me at length how the current state of affairs had come about.
>
> John Newman I met a fortnight after my arrival in Paris. I had an introduction to Mr Paine from a mutual acquaintance who was hiding from government agents outside Manchester. One afternoon – a Thursday? – I dined at White's Hotel; a meagre enough dinner – but I was not in Paris to fill my stomach but rather my mind. Present that afternoon: Mr Paine, Mrs Williams, Imlay and some other Americans – among whom J.N., a congenial young man of my own age. Fervent discussion of the Revolution; all concerned at the crisis of the Brissotins.
>
> Thus the three of us converged.

It was gone eight-thirty and Julia had eaten nothing since breakfast. She stretched, tensing her aching muscles, walked into the kitchen and squatted in front of the fridge. Although she was the only person to stock it, she was unable from one day to the next to remember what it contained. A tub of green-leaf salad of indeterminate age, rather slimy. Two plum tomatoes. The usual coffee, low-fat spread, jam and mustard. An inch or two of white wine at the bottom of a bottle she had opened when

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[11] The whole sentence has been scored out; the rest is illegible. JD.

Marcus and Sarah popped in for help with their essays. She stood up, slammed the door shut. If she went to Sainsbury's now, she could shop while it was quiet – no screaming children or shouting parents, no middle-aged women or old men gossiping with their trolleys across the aisles like barricades in the Paris streets. She could buy food for the next week. For one reason or another, her aim of shopping every Wednesday after work was rarely successful; late meetings, social engagements, fatigue or plain absent-mindedness usually got in the way.

When she returned an hour later, she heated half a pack of prawns with garlic and chilli and the remains of the white wine from the fridge, threw in a handful of rocket and served it with linguine. She ate on her sofa, feet on the coffee table, Jacques Brel playing on her iPod. Then, without washing up, she got out a large glass, filled it with half-price Corbières and returned to her desk. She was eager to read the next of the documents Peter Marchmont had given her.

12th April 1823 — Weariness forced me to sit and rest upon the bank by the side of the road not six or seven miles after leaving Chesterfield. I regret, that either my recent bout of illness or the encroachments of age have robbed me of the strength I once had. My body is no longer what it was. So short an interlude between this advancing incapacity – this consciousness of age and age's outcome, death – and that time in my life when a walk of 15 or 20 miles hardly began to curb the vigour within me. When I look back – but my whole life, it seems, has been an act of looking back –

It was a stroke of good fortune that it was at Joe's house that I fell ill. Had I been upon the road, I must surely not have survived. I had already been two weeks with him and his other guests – since the death of their poor Lizzie, not three years ago, he and Mrs Lovell are now alone, and his chief pleasure is to receive such of his friends who are disposed to share for a while their isolated cottage. It is the only dwelling within sight, in a desolate but beautiful valley. Joe owns neither horse nor donkey and carries out all his business on foot; he has no desire to travel further than Buxton or Chesterfield, the two nearest towns.

There being but two bedchambers in the house, the other guests – Harry, Gilbert and John – were squeezed into one, and I was therefore upon my arrival assigned the tiny attic. Though little bigger than a coffin, it was warm and snug, next to the chimney. Mrs Lovell provided us with mounds of food: ragouts, steak-and-kidney puddings, and once or twice a rack of beef on a Sunday. She seemed to welcome rather than merely tolerate our rowdy descent on her home; I suspect, that she was

glad of the company and the increase in activity it necessitated. Every evening after dinner, as it was by then starting to get dark (it was late in the year) we sat round the fire and read aloud the poetry or essays we had composed earlier in the day. Our intended purpose in coming together at Joe's house had been to put the best of our poems together in a volume which, copied out fair, I should then carry to London, to Longman or another, to enquire about publication. It is true we spent several mornings engaged in discussion – and critical debate – of the poems to be included; but our evenings were more given over to reading aloud our most recent works, with commentary from the others which veered between the bawdy and the vituperative, increasing in disorder as the evening – and the wine – wore on. I had translated some of the poems of Catullus – not with any view to publication but for my own amusement – and caused much hilarity in the reading of them. (It need not be stated that Mrs L. had retired to bed before these readings; what she would have made of Attila, castrated by his own hand in a frenzy of enthusiasm, or of incestuous Gellius, I cannot imagine.) I had made fresh translations of some of the essays of Montaigne and Voltaire; Harry and I had in mind also to publish a collection of essays, both translations and original works – but we could not agree on which to include. In the end, it was decided that I should travel to London when the warmer weather came, with the book of poems alone, which Mrs L. was to copy for us. We had allowed her to include one or two of her own, which she had read to us one afternoon: a sonnet on the death of their daughter and a ballad which retold the legend of Ann Schofield, a local girl who at the time of the Parliamentary Wars murdered a Royalist soldier whom she believed responsible for the death of her lover at the siege of Chesterfield. Later, racked with guilt, she hanged herself in her father's cowshed. Some believe that her ghost walks the hills at dusk in winter – an old wives' tale, though Sara Lovell had made a pretty enough ballad of it. John was of the opinion that a woman's verse was not to be mixed with our more noble efforts; but her skill with the language was every bit as good as his and I thought she possessed a talent which, if nurtured, might equal that of any of our female poets. Moreover, the look of elation – or was it of longing? – which passed over her face when she was requested to read, filled me with compassion. She confided to me one morning as we walked together to Buxton – ice underfoot, the slopes of the hills covered in thick hoar frost, the sun low and golden in a clear blue sky – that she had begun to write after the loss of her child – a diary, poems, anything which took her mind from the blow. They had no other children, and that weighed heavily upon her; she felt she had failed poor Joe – 'who nonetheless has never reproached me for it. But there is naught to be done,' she said, as she hitched up her skirts to climb the stile; 'we must bow to the will of Providence, and hope for our

fulfilment in the life to come.' She said she drew consolation from the contemplation of Nature – the countryside there so magnificent, a prospect which varied imperceptibly from day to day, a reminder of heavenly beneficence. – Though at the same time she felt the isolation of that place; she had grown up, she said, in Edinburgh and was used to company, to noise and busyness; but Joe had insisted on living in the house he had inherited from his uncle; it had been in his family for generations and its remoteness was for him an aid to his literary endeavours. Before the small success of his first book of poems, she told me, they had lived very frugally; now, however, he had a little income from its sales, and Sara had since inherited a small annuity from a cousin. 'But there is nothing here,' she said; 'to distract me.' She had started to collect and note down the legends of the place, which she had by hearsay from some of the farmers and old women of the district.

It was perhaps on this walk that I took cold; for not five days later, I was struck down with a pleurisy and was confined to bed for nigh on six weeks. Of two of them, I have little recollection except of an agonising pain in the side. John and Harry had left by then for Lancaster, from where, in the spring, they planned to walk to Westmorland and thence to Scotland. Gilbert offered to exchange rooms with me; but the Apothecary, called from Buxton by Joe at his own expence, said I was best left where I was; for he was not sure I would survive the move, and the room was at least warm. I was later bled and blistered – the latter a painful treatment which I hope never to have to endure again. My generally robust health has meant that I have for most of my life been beyond the orbit of medical men; whenever I am perturbed within their sphere, the drastic nature of their cures takes me by surprise.

This illness recalled to mind – possibly because the Apothecary administered a dose of laudanum – that which befell me ten years ago, and thus revived the horrors of that winter. I was unaware of the succession of the days; the darkness of that room without windows, my disease-induced helplessness, made time indiscernible; but at Christmas I heard them singing, downstairs, carols which told of redemption through the Christ-child, the end of the world's woe. It was then that ghosts I have never been able to exorcise, and probably never shall, hovered round my narrow bed – or rather stood looming, lowering, beside and at the foot of it. Nearly thirty years now! Sophie. Antoine. That other, whom I never knew, and his poor mother. Then, later, Henri – whom I would have allowed to escape but the fool would have none of it.

What reality have those ghosts? Are they truly unquiet spirits condemned to wander betwixt this world and the next? They appear to me only at moments of fever – never when I am well, when mind and body are whole – not even when I am inebriated; and thus I am inclined to treat them with the same scepticism as those

accounts of angels or fairies which pour from the mouths of the gullible, as morbid creations of a diseased mind. Yet at the moment they appear to me, they are real – as real as Joe or Sara who sat by my bedside from time to time – and they terrify me in their insouciant wholeness, more than if they appeared in accusatory gore. They come and go as if I were not there – never address to me a single word, or even a look – turn away from me as if I were distasteful to them. What is their purpose? To call me to account? To accuse or blame? To reject me?

When at last I was able to get out of bed, I was much weakened – but nonetheless experienced that joyful return to life which accompanies recovery from serious illness – a thankfulness to be still among the living, when I had so feared to be absorbed among the hordes of the dead. Not that I fear death in itself; I believe it is, as when an animal dies, merely the extinction of the life within us, the cessation of feeling and thought and experience. We live only in so far as our bodies live. The vital spark is indeed wondrous in its animation of otherwise dull flesh; but upon the idea that it will one day return to reanimate a body putrid, blown apart by cannon fire or decapitated by guillotine, which will then rise again in an aethereal state, I cannot pour enough scorn. Yet I fear to die because there are things I have left unfinished –

(And if I were wrong in my fiercely-held assumptions? If I were to rise again as the churchmen would have it? It would surely be to eternal damnation; for – inveterate and knowing – I have lived in what would be called a state of sin. And it is not only the sins of the flesh and of free-thinking – those bugbears of the religious mind – which would damn me, but the course of my life – my allegiances – the actions consequent upon those allegiances. I have committed treasonable offences in two countries – yet from the purest of motives.[12] I have fought – not as a soldier, but with the same resolve – never for personal gain, but for a belief.)

(A matter of position. – Treason on one side of a border = patriotism on the other.)[13] The engine of state: an unassailable linkage of gears and pistons, never silent, pounding out inhuman energy day and night; it crushes to nothing all who stand in its way. Thus were wiped out the hopes we bore in the last decade of the last century and the first of this. If I have been anything, I have been a gadfly, nothing more; biting and stinging here and there where I could; I carry no illusions regarding the efficacy of my actions.

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[12] This sentence is heavily scored out (but nonetheless legible). JD.
[13] This parenthesis is a later addition scrawled in the margin. JD.

> Early idealisms – mutated, stifled, disappointed, but never entirely abandoned. – I still believe these things, though I know I shall never see their fulfilment in my lifetime. Are we truly of different substance – rich and poor, aristocrat and commoner? Did not Spinoza remark that all Nature proceeds from but one substance? Are we not all men formed of the same stuff, and the wide differences between us only the result of the forces and conditions with which Nature has acted upon us? Like diamond and coal which, as Mr Davy has shown, are essentially the same.
>
> If my path has been tortuous, it is perhaps because straighter ways have been blocked.
>
> Freshly shaven after my illness, I looked in the mirror which hung in Joe's parlour. I was shocked to see, on its dim and blotched surface – what did I see? Not so much the visible marks of recent illness – the lines deepened round eyes and mouth, a pallor brushed on as it were by the wing of death; but it seemed as if I were staring another man in the face – one who was at the same time myself and not myself – as if this were not a glass I looked at, but another world, in which that other I existed as I in this, but reversed. And who – what – was I in that world? That man in the glass a stranger to me; I knew him and knew him not. – What is a reflexion? The play of light on a silvered surface, the image which enters the eye, the depth created by the mind on a plane. But the man I saw – a monster. Less a harbinger of death, than a reminder of past transgressions. Something to show Time's crowds, and let them witness.

Marchmont had clipped a note to the document at this point. 'You will see,' he wrote, in a large upright hand in blue ball-point,

> that Turnbull comes close to acknowledging his guilt here, albeit in somewhat vague terms. The fact that he confesses to treasonable offences in two countries – after an admission in the previous document that he attended revolutionary gatherings in Paris – can leave us in no doubt whatsoever; nor can the fact that Henri appears to him 'in accusatory gore'. And NB also: the fact that Henri refused to run away is a strong argument for his innocence.

Julia tapped her pencil on her desk. She thought she detected a hint of gloating in Marchmont's tone, although his textual analysis left a lot to be desired. He appeared to have misread Turnbull's statement about the ghosts, and the fact that Turnbull saw himself as a monster was, indeed, inexplicit; that comment could have referred to

anything. What was more, Marchmont had entirely glossed over the fact that Saint-Gilles was a fervent supporter of the Revolution and attended the Jacobin club regularly. Did he see that as just another Turnbull fiction? Julia wondered if he'd done more than skim-read the document and cherry-pick the bits which bolstered his thesis.

She hoped he wasn't going to make a habit of annotating every document he gave her; that would be extremely irritating. The passage continued on a new sheet of paper:

> I lifted a hand, watched the stranger rub his haggard cheek as I did; touched the glass and saw our fingertips meet. Perhaps, if I were to touch that Other, it would be the end of us both. And would that be so bad? A world-weariness overcomes me; born not just of illness and the consequent exhaustion of body and faculties, but of my life's length. As if, having lived for the last thirty years and odd the life of two men, I now suffered the ennui of an Octogenarian. My heart is heavy, oppressed at once by this hot humidity – the air so still that all nature seems to choke – and by a sadness unconquerable. Like a shooting-star I sped through the sky of my youth, then soon faded. Have I overreached myself? – In being more than one, I have, perhaps, not properly been anyone.
>
> A dangerous thing, the glass. It reveals the discrepancy between the inner and the outer man, between the body and the mind. – What dark features were masked by that face of mine in Joe's mirror; what amalgam of integrity and malice? – Yet the glass holds also a power to penetrate the darkness: two mirrors in a tube, and one can see into the farthest reaches of Space. Many years ago, one happy night in Slough, I saw the great telescope with which, night after night, Wm. Herschel and his sister scanned the heavens. He showed me a nebula, grey-whorled upon the night's black; an island universe, he surmised, distant beyond imagination.
>
> And the glass of truth is shattered, like a botched mirror thrown upon the workshop floor, scattered into fragments, each of which reflects a tiny grain of reality; but for the whole to be reassembled is perhaps an impossible task.
>
> The Austrian queen fled barefoot through Versailles' Hall of Mirrors, pursued by a horde of women. The mirrors which had once reflected her panniered and bejewelled self showed then her fear and indignation. Violated by the mob.
>
> Thus I have led myself, by an association of mirrors, back to that time from which I continually digress. It pains me to write of these things, even at this remove. And it is now a task of some difficulty, to sort one from another the threads which run criss-

cross through those months, an insane cat's-cradle. We vowed never to speak of them. We hardly needed the vow; the Thing itself had forged between us such a bond of secrecy that we had no desire to speak or to explain to others, as if it were an event like any other. But writing is not speaking, Henri is now long dead, and Newman (not the man he was) engaged upon a different game. (I last heard of him two years ago, when he had risen to a position of prominence in the Government of his own country.) And I, as I near my end (is this a fancy, or a reality? I hardly know) find it necessary to tell, to narrate, as if by doing so I kept the monster at bay.

When I arrived at the Château Ruffec – on a cold, wet night in May, soaked by a torrent of rain – I was a man already marked by dashed hopes and inconsolable grief, though I was but twenty. In the entrance hall, so wide and still after the strident disorder of narrow streets, the tiny rooms in which I had hidden myself in Paris, I felt that if I let go my vigilance I would seep away with the water which dripped from my cloak to the floor. I had ridden almost fifteen hours from Orléans, changing horses at Blois and Tours, but not stopping save to drink from a brook or to eat some of the small piece of bread I had bought with my last *sous* at Amboise.

Henri's sisters received me with kindness; that small château became a haven. (Though I could not forget the hell's mouth which had opened up before me in Paris, it was as if it clamoured merely behind the gates, like a mob refused entry.) Within its bounds I felt safe – though it was not so certain a matter. It is true that there was little to link me with Saint-Gilles; for although we had formed an association, and worked together, from my arrival in Paris, we had later taken precautions to go unnoticed. We moved south, to the faubourg St-Marcel, met as if by chance in public places. Later, when the fabric of our world fell apart and we were in danger of our lives, we went to ground. I knew nothing of his treachery. It was not so difficult, especially in those months, to disappear into the narrow streets and back alleys with their high rickety tenements and foul rooms. I dressed as a man of the people, imitated the rough accent of the quarter, moved from room to room so that no one came to know me well enough to suspect me beyond what was normal in that time of distrust and accusations. I lived from hand to mouth, but that was in those days not so unusual, the ache in the belly becoming a condition of life, like the sudden arrests, the never-ending processions to the guillotine. Life reduced itself to two points: to escape detection and capture, and to find food enough to live on. I understood then that my reasons for supporting the Revolution and those of the sans-culottes amongst whom I lived were vastly different. Mine derived from abstract notions of justice and equality, coupled with an observation of the poor in my own country; theirs from centuries of oppression which concentrated itself in the real experience of hunger, while not twelve

miles distant a *rex absconditus* hunted food he would never eat and his queen played a child's game, making believe she was a clean and well-fed shepherdess.

In early May (by which time it was obvious that our plan had gone awry and there was no hope for it) I determined to escape Paris if I could. In the end it was an easy thing. I walked through the Grille de Chaillot as the man I had become: a nameless, faceless sans-culotte. I had memorized the details of Henri's château; I did not have his permission to go there, but it seemed then the best – the only – course of action.

At the first inn, I used all the money I had about me, sewn into my threadbare clothes, to pay for a dinner and a bed. Rising at three, I stole the clothes and the purse of my bed-fellow; climbing out of the window, I was on my way before the sun had risen. I made a detour, going back the way I had walked, to allay suspicion, and came to the coaching inn at Meudon, where I took the coach to Orléans. I there paid for a horse and rode at full speed towards Ruffec.

On riding through its gates, I might have been arriving in a new world; it was as if, once I had passed beneath that wrought-iron archway, time itself stood still, as if an invisible fence surrounded the little château and its lands, which the forces of destruction raging across the country could not cross. There was food – more than I had seen for months, though Henri's sisters complained of its scarcity – a daily life of sorts, even the odd soirée or two – and I sank into it as I sank into the caressing softness of the huge mattress on which I slept each night. Here I was shielded from the darkness; a different man from the one who had run through the streets in Paris, who had sat in the public gallery in the Convention, who had watched the sickening executions and lived in squalor in the streets of the poorest sections.

I sank into a pleasant dream. Unable to contemplate the horrible and desperate events which had befallen me – events which I had plunged myself into, desperate to be part of something which had captured my imagination since 1789 – I ignored them, bundled them up in a sack which I stowed in a dark box in my memory. How easily the mind may dupe itself. But perhaps this is sometimes needful; for there are experiences which hurt or damage beyond measure, and without the protective blanket of a temporary forgetfulness, the mind might otherwise tear itself to shreds.

Thus, after all that had befallen me in Paris and exhausted as I was, I stepped into a new strength at the château, as if I were a new person. (This is not to say there was no reckoning – no hell to pay – for that time in Paris; but for that short time a gentle and healing oblivion wrapped itself around me.)

I am once more, however, skirting the crux of this narration. The worst I cannot tell. Each time I come near it – though today I am sitting in Montagu's library, at the small writing-table in the bay-window, a fresh supply of ink and a glass of claret to

hand – each time I approach it, my body as well as my mind revolts – a headache comes on, I begin to sweat, my heart pounds. If it were a tale I could tell to Montagu, the only man who might understand, it would perhaps be easier. Over a glass by the fire of an evening – a confession to an understanding priest. Though there is no absolution to be had, and to burden a friend – one of my few genuine friends! – with this dire account – what would he think of me? That man was not the man he knows. The weight of secrecy must remain.

Though I wish this task over and done, I also fear to conclude it. It is as if, once finished, it will sound the death knell of my life. Why this should be I am not certain. But I feel as if death approached me; as if he were even now riding over the Common, at a slow trot, waiting, biding his time, ready to appear at the right moment.

What had Marchmont made of the association in Paris between Richard Turnbull and Henri de Saint-Gilles? He'd not mentioned that in his note. She'd have to ask him. He probably hadn't seen the connection between Turnbull's arrival at Ruffec and Raoul's birth, either.

42.

The trial of Henri Jacques de Saint-Gilles, for High Treason
30th January 1813
X.

Richard Turnbull was sworn at three o'clock and examined by Mr Solicitor-General.

Mr Solicitor-General:	Describe the nature of the request made to you by Lord Alexander in May 1812.
Richard Turnbull:	He requested me to assist in the detection of a French spy.
Mr Solicitor-General:	Why did he ask you, do you think?
Richard Turnbull:	My previous habit of travelling about the country would prevent suspicion upon my suddenly leaving Clapham. My travels had given me knowledge and connexions which would help in the soliciting of information. I presume also that I was considered worthy of his trust.
Mr Solicitor-General:	How did you go about the task you had been set?

Richard Turnbull: I was provided with lodgings in Litchfield-street, where I lived for several weeks under a false name.

Mr Solicitor-General: Litchfield-street being the site of the house from which Joseph Barclay collected the packets which he transported to France in his cutter?

Richard Turnbull: Yes. It was assumed that this was the head quarters of the spy ring. From my lodgings, my rooms giving onto the street and number 7 being almost opposite, I was able to observe from my window the traffic at the house.

Mr Solicitor-General: Describe that traffic.

Richard Turnbull: Mons. LeConte appeared to live in the house. He had an assistant and two henchmen.

Mr Solicitor-General: The assistant was Mons. Grosmont, is that not so?

Richard Turnbull: Yes.

Mr Solicitor-General: And do you know the names of the henchmen?

Richard Turnbull: Dubois and Giroudet.

Mr Solicitor-General: Please continue.

Richard Turnbull: By the end of June I had ascertained from my observations that the intelligence was brought to the house in Litchfield-street by several men, who arrived at various hours of the day and at intervals of two, three or four weeks. Either LeConte or Grosmont was there to receive them, sometimes both. Since Mr Barclay collected the packets monthly, it was reasonable to assume that a monthly collation was made of all this information, probably by the ringleader.

Mr Solicitor-General: You saw the ringleader at the house?

Richard Turnbull: I did not. If he lived in the house, he never left it; if he came and went it was by stealth.

Mr Solicitor-General: You kept watch at all times?

Richard Turnbull: I employed a lad I knew, who lived with his mother in the Seven Dials, but who could be trusted. He kept watch while I was sleeping or absent from the house.

Mr Solicitor-General: This boy’s name?

Richard Turnbull: He answered to Martin, though I doubt that was his actual name.

Mr Solicitor-General: Yet you were certain he could be trusted?

Richard Turnbull: As much as any man may be trusted. I paid him a generous fee. I had information which ensured his co-operation.

Mr Solicitor-General: Did you enter the house during the time of your observation?

Richard Turnbull: On two occasions only; it was well guarded, its inhabitants secretive. But once, I feigned to be a neighbour, a Mr Sampson, a manufacturer who had recently taken up residence nearby after a reversal in fortune. LeConte, who called himself the master of the house, was disconcerted by the bluff stranger who demanded tea and muffins and friendly conversation, but he revealed nothing.

Mr Solicitor-General: You ascertained nothing of use?

Richard Turnbull: On the contrary. My purpose in calling was to reconnoitre the layout of the house in preparation for my next visit.

Mr Solicitor-General: Which took place when?

Richard Turnbull: A few days later. By stealth and under cover of darkness. I had noted that the house was barely lived in; there was but one servant, a young girl; the rooms were dark and dirty and without order. It had the air of a transitory place; used but not lived in. When I broke in at night, I was able to prod and poke at my ease. The parlour, into which Mr Sampson had been shown, concealed a small cabinet in which I found a writing desk, with many documents of interest locked in a drawer: they contained details of the army and navy, the state of the defences of this realm, in various hands on various sheets of paper.

Mr Solicitor-General: What did you make of these documents?

Richard Turnbull: I presumed them to be fragments of intelligence brought by the various informers and held ready for collation or copying.

Mr Solicitor-General: Was that the extent of your discoveries that night?

Richard Turnbull: I also found a seal in the drawer.

Mr Solicitor-General: Can you describe it?

Richard Turnbull: It had a design of two leaves intertwined. Leaves of hawthorn.

Mr Solicitor-General: Look carefully at this seal and tell me if you recognise it.

Richard Turnbull: Yes; it is the seal which I saw at Litchfield-street.

Mr Solicitor-General: And what happened then?

Richard Turnbull:	I was disturbed in my search. One of the men – it was Dubois, I knew him by his plodding tread – came down from the floor above; whether to investigate the noise I had made in picking the lock of the drawer, or to make a routine check of the house, I knew not. But I was ready for him and as he entered the cabinet, I pinned him to the wall and offered my knife to his throat. I thought I might turn this reversal to good use and force him to reveal the name of his master. He was either intrepidly stubborn or genuinely ignorant, however, and would name only Mons. LeConte. He said the master was referred to only as 'Monsieur'; no one knew his name. I asked where this Monsieur lived, but on that he was equally unforthcoming. He did nonetheless let slip that 'Monsieur rode to London only about once a month'; from which I inferred that he lived outside the city. I requested a description of Monsieur; but the one he gave me was of little use.
Mr Solicitor-General:	Being what exactly?
Richard Turnbull:	That he was a man of slim figure and medium height, with brown eyes and brown hair cut short.
Mr Solicitor-General:	That fits the description of the prisoner, does it not?
Richard Turnbull:	It does; but also of four fifths of the Frenchmen in London and Paris together; hence it was of little use.

43.

It was the first truly warm day of the year, the sun struggling down over the high rooftops. Julia had borrowed a garden chair from Mr Carmichael who lived in the basement flat and placed it in the patch of sunlight at the bottom of the shared garden. A garden old and tired, overgrown and formless; a promiscuous mix of ancient honeysuckle, creeping ivy and a hundred aquilegia gone to seed. Mr Carmichael was always apologetic about it, but Julia felt it held a chaotic charm; unrestrained and wild, it was somehow conducive to thought. The paving stones, probably original – the house had been built around 1870 – were patterned with

concentric black lichens, overhung by flowering currant bushes and clumps of belladonna.

Julia spread out on her portable writing desk the last of the letters Peter Marchmont had given her a week ago. He'd been generous this time and she had detected a slight shift in his attitude; not a warmth, exactly, but a keenness, a suppressed eagerness for her to take what he offered. A child offering a stern parent his attempt at a drawing or a story. Strange man. But his psychology was irrelevant, as long as the documents kept coming. She had given him only three copies from the Bank House journal. She wanted material in reserve, in case she needed to bargain with him.

The letter she was now looking at comprised eleven sheets of grey A4; in the middle of each sheet lay the image of Richard Turnbull's close-written page of octavo. It was undated; but, after an account of Turnbull's visit to the newly-widowed Mrs Hanbury, he discussed in some detail a lecture given by the physician and polymath Thomas Young at the Royal Society. From that, Julia had established its date as November 1803. It was then that Young had read his paper, 'Experiments and Calculations Relative to Physical Optics', which provided significant evidence for the wave theory of light.

> ... It is Dr Young's belief that Light – like the infinite Sea – has the form of a wave. A fine fellow, and exceeding clever; yet greatly enabled by his vast fortune. His demonstration was of great interest & absorbed me totally for the hour during which he spoke. He had, he said, painstakingly passed a beam of Light through a small hole in a window-shutter, onto little slips of card paper very narrow in Breadth, and observed the Shadows made by that card. These are not sharp but rather blurred by Fringes of colour on either side; the edges of the shadow being also divided into parallel fringes of light and dark. The said fringes are caused by the inflexion of the light by the slips of Card. Doctor Young calls this 'Diffraction' – the shattering of the light ray into constituent parts, so that interference occurs between those parts.
>
> This is indeed remarkable, & it seems to me that his account might be conclusive. Yet there were those who afterwards expressed reservations.
>
> — A heresy, I heard one gentleman say, to draw such a conclusion from such flimsy evidence – a Phenomenon noted & dealt with by Newton. This flying in the face of Newton's particulate theory may, I fear, cause Dr Young some controversy; for this, and other such comments, though couched politely enough, was not friendly

opposition but more like the growling of the dog pack before it sets upon the quarry. Jos, too, thought the matter dubious. — I grant that it explains the phenomenon of Diffraction, he said; but what of the simplest fact? That light propagates itself in a rectilinear fashion, there is no doubt. Yet a wave has not a rectilinear motion. As Newton said, light neither follows crooked passages nor bends into shadow.

— Indeed, said his friend Dr Bunton, a medical man like Dr Young. I have not heard such a ridiculous notion for many a year as that two rays of light might combine to produce darkness. The man is a fool, by God. Let his poor patients beware.

But for myself, I felt this to be an occasion of some Moment, as though I had entered the portals of the Society illumined by the corpuscular rays of Sir Isaac Newton, but left it illumined by the waves of Dr Young.

Yet the question remains: can the hidden nature of Light be revealed? Is it possible ever to determine such a ticklish question? By what means or apparatus? Are there matters beyond which the ingenuity of even the most ingenious of men cannot trespass?

Young is a man after my own heart, spreading his abilities wide. Though any man with a modicum of intelligence and the wherewithal to take a degree (money, patience & the willingness to bow to the demands of the Church) may set himself up and dispense useless cures to patients who will die or recover willi nilhi, Young has intellect in abundance. He has an interest in languages as well as in the mechanical arts, and has carried out work on the Voice & the Eye. Jos said he would try to effect me an introduction; but I reminded him that I am shortly to leave London & that in January I am to take a commission from Lord Houghton to act as his librarian; which task will agreeably see out the rest of the Winter.

The Royal Society, to which this was my first visit, has some fine rooms on the Strand. Though this is not, Osborne informs me, its original locus, I nonetheless felt on entering the ornate-ceilinged hall the weight of time, the shades of Halley and Hooke, and of the great Sir Isaac himself. It is a more solemn place than the more recently-founded Institution, which Osborne and his cronies call ‘the other place’.

— What we lack in sparkle, he told me, we make up for in gravity. And we do quite well without that carnivalesque mood and those large ladies of a certain age who go only to be seen, or to say afterwards that they have attended a lecture of natural philosophy as they would a play – tho’ they understand nothing of it. Dr Young had been Professor there, Jos informed me, till but recently; yet I am surprised at it, for he is the very antithesis of an ardent speaker. Some of the Company wore expressions of boredom, & others seemed to drowse; nonetheless, tho’ the benches are not comfortable, I soon forgot the discomfort of my body in the edification of my mind.

> Jos kindly took me home to dine with him, stopping on the way at Morland's which is not far from the Society; there he laid out near 2 Guineas for a pair of miserable mezzotints for his collection – insipid shepherds and animals. As we walked back down King-street he recommended to me 'a fine bordello, where the girls are young and ripe and not old hags made up to look 20 years younger,' and in which he has not once caught a clap.

Julia's phone rang. She fished it out of her pocket. The sun had moved; she was now sitting in the shade and felt chilly.

'Hello, Julia.'

'Mum. Is everything all right?'

'Yes, of course. I was just ringing to remind you to send Clarissa and Harry an Easter card. You won't forget, will you?'

'I don't send Easter cards, mum. You know that.'

'But everyone sends them, now.'

'No, everyone doesn't. It's a con. Like Christmas all over again.'

'But you forgot to send them a Christmas card. They sent such lovely ones to everybody. And they're not even married yet.'

'I didn't forget. I don't send Christmas cards either.'

'You sent one to your father and I.'

She winced at the nob's pronoun. 'That's because you're my parents. But not to anyone else. It's a commercial tyranny and I resent it.'

'I just wish you'd be a little more thoughtful, Julia. You've not turned into a socialist, have you?'

'No, mother, I've not turned into a socialist. It's just a waste of time and money.'

'But it's such a little thing. You don't always have to be thinking about everything, you know.'

'OK, mum. Just send me their address. I've got to go; I'm working.' She returned to the letter.

> We were four at dinner – Jos and I, Mrs Osborne – a young but plain woman – and Mrs O's mother who lives with them. Mrs Simkin makes up for her daughter's leanness by her own rotundity, and for her daughter's silence by the vacuous prattling which issues from her full mouth, above which, on the left-hand side, is a wart which, without success, she tries to disguise with a Beauty-Spot.

— It seems to me, I said, after I had downed my soup – I was hungry, not having eaten that day – that to invest in one man the final word upon any matter is to bestow a spurious Authority, far beyond that which it is sensible to confer on a mortal.

— Aye, but if you do not have authority, said Jos, then any Tom, Dick or Harry can set up his own views as dogma.

— But natural philosophy is not a priesthood, to be administered by hide-bound old men; its authority comes not from ancient texts and unquestionable doctrines but from demonstrable facts. Newton himself showed that. To set Newton up as the new Aristotle is surely a retrograde step.

— But there is the small matter of orthodoxy. It is a brave man – or a foolhardy one – who takes upon himself to contradict Newton.

— Sir Isaac was a fine man and a much abler one, no doubt, than we shall see for many a year, Doctor Young included. Yet I will not concede that he was infallible. He was instrumental in freeing knowledge from the constricting grip of orthodoxy; it is incumbent upon us not to fashion a new priesthood which will bring it back into slavery. – I should have continued, but for the acrid tones of Mrs. Simkin which cut the conversation dead like a misapplied scalpel.

— Mr Turnbull, she said, the wart quivering fearsomely at me, I would thank you not to voice such seditious Nonsense in front of my daughter. We are a pious household, loyal to King and Church. Your lack of submission displeases me. – I caught Jos's eye, which wore at once an expression of exasperation and of entreaty; so I begged the fat witch's pardon, and ate my mutton and syllabub in near silence. – Jos and I resumed the conversation later, alone in his study.

Richard Turnbull had been right to foresee controversy over the reaction to Young's lecture. It had not been well received at all. A vituperative attack on both Young and his wave theory (not the first his work had received) was published in 1804 in the recently-founded *Edinburgh Review*. It claimed the theory contained 'more fancies, more blunders, more unfounded hypotheses, more gratuitous fictions, all upon the same field on which Newton trod, all from the fertile, yet fruitless, brain of the same eternal Dr Young'. Young had identified the anonymous author as the same Henry Brougham who had been one of the founders of the *Review*, a fellow member of the Royal Society and, later, designer of the carriage which bore his name; an outlandish northern name which in London had been tamed to a single pronounceable syllable. Brougham does not come well out of this story, appearing as a scientific traditionalist who allowed his personal prejudices to spill over into his thinking. (There is a hint of

some bad blood between him and Young, a grievance relating to his election to the Royal Society a few years earlier.) In contrast, his later achievements as a radical lawyer, a friend of Hazlitt, Leigh Hunt, Byron and Lamb, show a different man altogether: a champion of the downtrodden, an advocate of free speech and reform, both political and educational.

Young had gone on to produce what he thought was clinching evidence for his theory. His experiment with diffraction on cards, explained in the 1803 lecture, had been followed by another, reported in the published version of his *Lectures* in 1807. This was the double-slit experiment, in which monochromatic light was passed through two slits, producing an interference pattern of alternate light and dark bands on a screen, thus adding further support to the wave theory of light. But, so hurt was Young by Brougham's derisive comments, that he largely abandoned the study of light; it was only with the work of the Frenchman Fresnel, engineer of the Ponts et Chaussées, some fifteen years later, that the baton was taken up again.

Julia, however, with the advantage of history and her scientific education, knew that the fact of the matter was far stranger than Young, or Brougham, or Richard Turnbull could have imagined. Light had been found to be not wave or particle, but both. Wave and particle; Bohr's wavicle. A century after Young, and some twenty years after Freud had attempted a description of the unconscious, that murky and largely unknowable penumbral world which each of us carries around, physicists were making forays into a similarly murky world which seems to border on the limits of knowability. Young's double-slit experiment had been echoed by another which seemed to posit a world in which strangeness and uncertainty are the rule. Niels Bohr and Werner Heisenberg had sat at a table and, somewhere amongst the discarded coffee cups and Carlsberg bottles, the mirror of our reality had shattered.

The world of ordinary reality, of bills and meals and getting to work on time; of other bodies in the tube, solid objects which are one thing and not another; that world still remained, governed by fixed laws and predictable outcomes. But it was undermined, thrown into nebulous confusion by notions of indeterminacy, duality, equivalence; by a world in which causality and objectivity as we understand them fly out of the window. For while the discoveries of quantum mechanics refer to the world of subatomic particles and of speeds approaching that of light, they have implications for the macro-world which cannot be ignored. The mobile phone, the computer, the washing machine; all the paraphernalia of modern life, the machines

we cannot do without, are predicated upon quantum theory. Recondite though it is, its importance cannot be underestimated. The sound of the bell, once struck, travels on through time.

Julia despised easy certainties. But she clung to the certainties of evidence, of reasoned conclusions, of 'truth'. Her love of physics had stemmed at least in part from the reassuring aspect of its predictability. F=ma, unlike the quirks of human psychology, gave the same results every time, everywhere in the universe. Yet the universe had turned out to be a stranger place by far than anyone had bargained for. With the advent of rationality the old monsters of the bestiaries and the self-propelled ships of the mediaeval lays had receded, only to be replaced at the beginning of the twentieth century by particles and forces of a seemingly equal weirdness. F=ma had been complicated to a remarkable degree by E=hf. The observer, bringing an energy of her own, changes the state of what she observes. The act of observation is inseparable from the phenomenon observed.

Duality – or complementarity as Bohr called it – seemed to lie at the heart of reality. Identity was not single but double. And if light could be two things at once, why not other entities? All particles can exhibit both wave and particle properties. We slip so easily into thinking in terms of binary oppositions. Black and white. Good and evil. Fact and fiction. But one thing can so easily become its opposite. A profound truth, Niels Bohr had often remarked, is one whose opposite is also true. Richard Turnbull's reality had been defined by the light and dark oppositions of Regency society: rich and poor, power and disenfranchisement, tradition and reform. But at the centre of his life stood shadowy events which were hard to observe or to elucidate. The path from radical to government spycatcher was not problematic if he had changed his political standpoint, as so many had in those days; yet there was no evidence that he had ever reneged on his early convictions.

But what if? What if Richard Turnbull were not one thing or another, but both? Friend and betrayer. Loyal subject and traitor. Could that be possible? He could have been a double agent – or a double double agent. It was possible that he had no fixed identity at all; that he merely made himself up as he went along, a sort of extreme early Sartrean existentialist. He shifted constantly; like those black and white pictures which revealed an old hag or a beautiful young woman depending on how you looked at them.

The second double-slit experiment, devised by Richard Feynman, abolished certainty. Laplace's idea, that one could know enough about the universe to make accurate predictions, had been abolished by Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, which states that it is impossible to know simultaneously a particle's position and its momentum. A fact which has nothing to do with inadequacy of equipment or of experimental methods; it seems to be an inherent property of nature. A limit to what can be known.

'Like the tide,' Turnbull had written, 'I am always upon the flux.' He was changeful, constantly swinging between city and country, sophistication and simplicity. What if this were the key to his identity? That, like light, he was not one thing or another but both at the same time. That, like light, the character he displayed to you depended on the questions you put to him.

As she herself was two different people. Underneath the Julia who was organised, competent and rational, who got things done and got what she wanted out of life, there lurked another: the woman who dreamt she danced the sarabande with a masked man whose identity she did not know. She was both these women, at one and the same time; and perhaps also a third, the one who withheld the information from herself.

'Cup of tea?' It was Mr Carmichael at her elbow. 'I've got the kettle on. Move your chair and we'll sit in the sunshine.' Five minutes later he returned, holding out in a shaky hand a china cup and saucer with an intricate design of red and gold on a cream background.

'It was part of a wedding present. I've only got two left. But Emily didn't believe in not using things that were meant to be used. So I get them out from time to time.'

'It's beautiful,' she said. Mr Carmichael told her part of his life story every time she saw him. Now in his early eighties, he'd lived in the same dim basement rooms since his marriage in 1957. He'd been a minor civil servant; his wife, who'd taught at the Haberdashers' Aske's girls' school a ten-minute walk away, had died of cancer four years after they were married. 'Just as we were thinking of buying our own house. I've never had the heart to leave the place where we were so happy.'

'Gone to rack and ruin, hasn't it?' he said, indicating the garden with his free hand. 'I used to be so proud of it. Kept it nice, all the beds laid out, something in flower whatever the time of year. Mowed the grass twice a week.'

'Who looks after it now?'

‘Mervyn took over responsibility for it when my arthritis got too bad. I wouldn’t say he looks after it, would you?’

‘No, but it has a certain charm.’

Mr Carmichael must have been born around the time that Heisenberg worked with Bohr in Copenhagen, developing his uncertainty principle. Strange thing, time. The more she worked with it and thought about it, the less she understood it. She was bound in her present as she was bound in her personality; yet she sometimes felt – the combined effect of research and imagination – that she was half-living in a past age. But, though facts and imagination went a long way, it was impossible to know, really know, what life had been like for Richard Turnbull, Henri de Saint-Gilles or his sisters. Or even for Mr Carmichael for that matter. Was it possible to know the quiddity of someone else’s life? What did she know of Miles; what did he know of her? He saw, perhaps, only what he wanted to see. What was life like for Katrina, pregnant two years into her degree; or for Peter Marchmont for whom it was so important that he was a descendant of Henri de Saint-Gilles? And she knew Richard Turnbull only through his writings. Was this man she thought she knew, with his enigmatic smile, his blue-grey eyes, his dark hair tied carelessly back into a ribbon, a more or less accurate approximation based on the facts, or merely a figment of her imagination?

44.

Peter takes his breakfast cup of tea into the Blue Teapot’s small yard. He enjoys the short period of early-morning calm before the hordes arrive, when he can sit on the bench by the wall, wrapped in the silence in his head. He takes a sip of tea and closes his eyes.

With the letter of November 1803, in which Turnbull discussed Young’s lecture and the nature of light, Peter could still have turned back. For it was only a copy; executed with intense accuracy, but still only a copy. But he will not turn back. That letter has been a success. No comeback, no queries. A dove he has sent out; its non-return announces a new world. He’d had to make do with photocopies; his only authentic paper was in the notebook, which he wished to keep intact. The girl was clever; she’d notice things like that. In fact, he was relying on her conscientiousness

and skill. If she endorsed it, the notebook had a much better chance of seeing the light of day as a serious historical document.

Some would say that what he is concocting is a fiction, but it is more subtle than that. He has been chosen; the truth has been revealed to him and he must make it known. He is forging the evidence into a particular shape, perhaps. Not the same shape as that perceived by Julia Dalton, but one of equal validity. Like the letter, what he is about to produce is a forgery only in a technical sense. Its content, though unattested, is authentic.

For it wasn't always obvious, from a random accumulation of documents, what had actually happened. There was no hard-and-fast evidence of Saint-Gilles's innocence, he was convinced of it. Saint-Gilles was innocent; of that there was no doubt. Many documents had been lost; either Henri had written little, or nothing of his had survived. You'd expect Turnbull, the spy, to have been careful about the records he left behind; but no, he was into promiscuous scribbling in a big way. But so much the better; it made his, Peter's, job that much easier. Who would query one more manuscript from the pen of one who wrote so much? And the fact that Turnbull had never completed his planned autobiography, leaving only numerous fragments, meant that a few contradictions here and there wouldn't be so very remarkable.

The written evidence for Saint-Gilles's life was scanty, and what did exist was biased: Montagu's *Memoir* of his friend Richard Turnbull; that traitor's correspondence and other pabulum. There existed a verbatim record of Henri's trial; but that had been a sham; the real facts hadn't come out. No, if Peter knew his friend's life in some detail, it was down to Saint-Gilles himself. Information from the horse's mouth. He'd sat face-to-face with Peter and told him the story as it really was, one friend to another. The fact that they were separated by a couple of centuries was irrelevant.

Seven forty-five; he gulps back the last of the tea. In fifteen minutes they'll start to flood in for their early-morning breakfasts and takeaways. Lattes and cappuccinos, green tea, hot chocolate, orange juice. Muffins, pains aux raisins, breakfast paninis.

In the early days, when Peter had been a boy of fifteen or sixteen, and he and Saint-Gilles had been getting to know each other, they'd talked for hours together, in Peter's bedroom or wandering in Regent's Park. At first Henri had given out only snippets of information, as if he'd been shy; but there was one Saturday afternoon which stuck out in Peter's mind, when they'd chatted together for over three hours

and he'd heard most of Saint-Gilles's life-story. Peter's mother had gone out. She'd said she was going to do some shopping, but he knew she'd gone to meet a man and wouldn't be home for hours. It was Mrs Seymour's day off and Peter was alone in the house, which meant he could be anybody, do anything. Mrs S. had left sandwiches and cake for his lunch, and written on a sheet of blue notepaper instructions for reheating the lamb stew at dinner-time, just in case his mother was late back. He hoped she was; he preferred it on his own.

He'd been working on an essay. He gave his mother thirty minutes – she was in the habit of forgetting some vital item from her handbag – perfume spray, tail comb or peppermints – then left the desk in his bedroom and went down to the kitchen for a buttered scone and a cup of tea. He tuned the large radio to the Third Programme, or Radio 3 as it had recently been renamed (Mrs Seymour only ever listened to the Light Programme) and turned the volume up so that the music – Beethoven, was it? Brahms, perhaps – blared out and made the cups buzz on the dresser.

It was while he was sitting at the large oak table staring down the hallway to the front door with its stained-glass panels, one of them newer than the others, that he heard a voice behind him.

'You'll give yourself indigestion, eating so fast.' He turned with a smile of delight to see his friend standing behind him. Waves of light seemed to swerve around him. As though this particle of history had suddenly been delivered through the centuries by translation into these waves of perception. Was this something to do with life's duality, or its complementarity? The light diffracted slightly around the Frenchman's figure, as it had in Thomas Young's experiment. Peter motioned to Henri to sit in one of the armchairs by the fire. He refilled the teapot and placed it carefully on the hearth, covered in its old knitted cosy.

'If you ate stuff, you could have had one of Mrs S's scones,' he said. 'They're very good. In fact, they're so good I'm going to have another while we talk.'

And Saint-Gilles had talked nineteen to the dozen that afternoon. His experience was typical of that of many French aristocrats of his period. Born into a minor aristocratic family with lands in Poitou as well as an *hôtel* in Paris, he was nineteen when the Revolution broke out. 'Not much older than you are now,' he said. 'And at first we thought it might bring welcome changes to the country, speed up the process of reform. Even when the rabble stormed the Bastille, we thought – my friends and I, that is – my father was much more cautious and set in his ways – that it was perhaps

a good thing that such a powerful symbol of the old régime had been destroyed. Though none of us were too happy at de Launay's lynching – and that really set the tone for what was to follow. Always a dangerous lot, the rabble.'

'Put people together,' said Peter, 'and they become cruel and sadistic. I know that.'

That the Revolution had some positive features – in that it sought to redress gross injustices – both Peter and Saint-Gilles were prepared to concede. However, any movement controlled by an uneducated mob was bound to end in a bloodbath; and the wholesale persecution of the aristocracy was monstrous. And then Lavoisier. Such a loss to science. Saint-Gilles was an educated man of liberal views. Before the Revolution he had spent his days attending salons with like-minded acquaintances and conducting scientific experiments in a laboratory constructed in the grounds of the family home.

'But they destroyed all that. A whole way of life. One evening in March 1792 a messenger arrived. One of my friends had sent him. He said a warrant had been put out for my arrest and if I wished to save my life I must flee immediately.'

'What did you do?'

'I took as much money as I could lay my hands on, along with some of my most treasured books; had a horse saddled and left that night. I arrived in England with nothing but the clothes I stood up in, the books and the remains of the money.'

'Where did you live?'

'I rented two small rooms in a house just north of Oxford Street. There was another French refugee in the rooms next door. We were reduced to giving French and dancing lessons to the children of the English gentry.'

Peter poured himself more tea. Henri had used the name de Lessac in those days, a name to which he was entitled, having inherited the estates of Lessac from an aunt on his mother's side. 'I felt safer that way; it was a name I'd never used in France, so I was less likely to be traced. I feared French agents, even though I'd been reduced to nothing.'

'How long did you stay in London?'

'Oh, several years. I had little to live on, but it was enough. Better than the guillotine.'

And over the years, Peter had added details to the story. He'd pumped his Aunt Lydia for information, read as much as he could, pieced together the bits of the story. It had taken years.

He'd not found out about Richard Turnbull till much later. Saint-Gilles was reticent about his trial and execution; the poor man was ashamed – though surely he must know that Peter wasn't going to think ill of him for that. Turnbull was a Jacobin in the pay of the French. He made no attempt to hide his revolutionary ideals (and thus in some ways was an unlikely friend for Saint-Gilles) but this was just part of an elaborate double-bluff. All his life was an elaborate double-bluff. He appeared to be a mere wandering scholar, an innocent with revolutionary and atheistic tendencies, friends in high and low places; but this was a persona he cultivated so as better to move about the country gathering intelligence without arousing suspicion.

Time to open the Blue Teapot. He takes his mug inside, washes his hands, puts on his clean black apron. Ready to face the day. As he unlocks the door, he realizes he is gratified that Julia Dalton has taken to popping into the Blue Teapot now and then. Why, he's not quite sure; but he likes it when people are nice to him.

In the six months before Saint-Gilles's arrest, Richard Turnbull had spent several months wandering – it was detailed in Montagu's *Memoir*. Things were getting a bit too hot in London; there were suspicions. Perhaps Saint-Gilles himself felt that something was wrong; he was after all Turnbull's closest friend. To deflect these suspicions, Turnbull had accepted the government commission and left London on the pretext of flushing out the French spy. When he returned to Clapham, he shut himself in his rooms; two days later, on 29th November, Henri was arrested. It was his custom to take dinner at Turner's coffee-house every afternoon at three o'clock. Turnbull often dined with him, and sometimes they were joined by their other friend, William Montagu. They would sit in the corner by the bow window, discussing the latest news and the progress of the war. On this dark and windy November afternoon, when sleety rain blustered against the window panes, Henri and Montagu had just called for a bowl of punch when the King's Men arrived. The traitor was nowhere to be seen. But Saint-Gilles had no need to be told who had betrayed him. The street rang with his shouts, with the name of Richard Turnbull.

And that was that. Saint-Gilles was tried and executed, his name for ever blackened. Misunderstood, calumnied, betrayed. Until now. Peter made up for the

passivity in his relationship with Saint-Gilles by acting on his behalf in the so-called real world. And his work was progressing.

In one of the papers from Bank House Richard Turnbull gave a hint of some evil he'd committed in Paris. It didn't matter that its nature was unspecified; the fact that it existed showed Turnbull's propensity for wickedness. Peter had copied the passage into the notebook the night before:

> Helter-skelter, ragged of mind, I ran through the streets of Paris.
> A dark evil brooding.
>
> Saw then, what Man is capable of
> – within my own heart the same
>
> Many of those who committed heinous acts had no intention to do evil. On the contrary, their intent was for good: to purge the patrie, to protect it from evil, from traitors.
>
> How, then, did they turn out to be tyrants and monsters?
>
> How can a traitor be discerned?
>
> The Revolution turned in upon itself, imploded, consumed itself.
>
> So easy to write of impersonal forces, but we were men and women.
>
> That one night when I became someone other; surely I was not that man? Whence that blood-lust, the furious instincts I had hitherto and have ever since considered foreign in every way to my nature?
>
> But it was not of the Revolution that I thought that night.

He'd also read through a letter in which Turnbull described a chance reunion with Henri de Saint-Gilles in London in 1810. He'd use that in the journal, too, adapting it so it read like a fragment of autobiography.

Lord Ashford, Brandon House,
Chesterfield

Clapham, 7th April 1810

My dear Ashford

I thank you for your kind enquiries and the gift of 5 guineas, which arrived – like manna in the wilderness – when I most needed it. I am happy to say, I have now found a position and am settled – *mirabile dictu* – in this pleasant village which, though a few miles distant from London, is close enough for me to travel there – by coach, or horse, or on foot – as often as I please. Not fifty years ago, according to Lysons's *Environs of London*, this village was little better than a morass and the roads impassable; it now has all the advantages of a village near the metropolis, without the stinking miasmas by which London is contaminated.

You will recall, I have no doubt, our conversation last winter (over a bottle or two of your excellent claret) on the subject of chance. This conversation was forcefully recalled to me by an encounter which – although it does not lead me to believe in the guiding hand of Providence which you would assert lies behind all such occurrences – nonetheless appears to me little short of marvellous.

In its concentration of book-shops, London is superior to any other city in the country; since my arrival here, I have spent many a pleasant hour in one or another, reading and occasionally purchasing a volume when I am in cash. Last Thursday, I had spent a pleasant hour and a half at Mr Hone's, and with the remains of your generous gift purchased two volumes and a few pamphlets. As it was a fine day I sauntered up the Strand to Mr Ackermann's, intending to pass the rest of the afternoon there before riding back to my lodgings. But I had not come within ten paces of the shop when I was accosted in the street by none other than a very old acquaintance of mine. Such a strange co-incidence. Imagine – a man – a Frenchman – I have not seen for the best part of 20 years! – from whom I originally parted in the most distressing of circumstances, coolly walking towards me down the Strand. He was lately come to London, and was overjoyed to see me.

But that is not the whole of the matter. The reason I recount this event to you, is that our first meeting also, on the deck of a packet-boat in the English Channel, was itself a chance encounter. Had he not bumped into me as I was half-slumbering on the deck, our acquaintance should not have been made, and we should each have gone our separate ways, probably never to have known each other. Make of that what you will.

As this old-new friend – his name is Henri de Saint-Gilles – was in need of a lodging, his present one in London being not to his liking – he suffers from Asthmas and other ailments of the bronchia – I suggested he take the empty rooms in the house next mine – a suggestion he found most congenial. I have introduced him to another friend of mine who lives not far away, and the three of us meet often. We frequent a coffee-house in Green-street run by one Mr Joseph Turner, and are all three at home there. Last evening we ate together and amused ourselves by guessing which of our fellow diners-out were government narks. (To my mind, this inferior species is as obvious as daylight; but we derived some amusement from the disagreement between us, and parted in a state of friendly inebriation.)

With which happy detail I bid you, with thanks once more, goodbye.

RT

This was the second document Peter had come across recently which referred to an association between Henri and the traitor in Paris during the Revolution. The same fact had come up at Henri's trial, but Peter had never been sure what to make of it. Strange that Henri had never mentioned it; too insignificant, no doubt.

45.

Once again Julia found herself in Paris. Pulling her small wheeled suitcase across the concourse of the Gare du Nord towards the metro station, she was surprised to see Mathias Fournier, hands in pockets, waiting for her.

'How did you know I'd be on that train?'

'I didn't. But you said evening and there is only a finite number of trains. Can I drive you to your hotel? The car's not far away. Then I thought we could have dinner; is that OK?' he said, standing still amidst crowds of people rushing in all directions.

'Carmen's invited me over tonight for a drink. She's got copies of some of the papers, apparently.'

'Tomorrow, then?'

'Tomorrow's the Society meeting, isn't it?'

'Yes, I'd forgotten. Perhaps Friday? I want to hear all about your research.' She lifted her case into the tiny boot.

‘Did you book in at the hotel I recommended?’ he asked, when they were sitting in the evening traffic on the Boulevard de Magenta.

‘The Ampère? No; I got a three-night deal at the Hôtel des Arènes. Not far from Carmen’s apartment. Do you know it?’

‘On the rue Monge? By the amphitheatre?’

‘That’s the one. Don’t you find driving in Paris more of a hindrance than a help?’ she asked as the car advanced fifty yards, then stopped again.

‘Maybe. But I enjoy it. It’s a luxury, like my cello. Do you disapprove?’

‘Cars are bad for the environment.’

‘I consider myself rebuked. Do you drive?’

‘I drive but I’d never run a car in London.’

Later, walking to Carmen Broussard’s apartment on the rue des Wallons, she felt a sense of dislocation, as if she were suspended between one place and another, one time and another. The streets were full – people rushing home from work, their minds full of meetings or profits, marking or what to cook for dinner, hurrying out again to the opera and the theatre, each in their own world. But behind them she saw a different crowd, like the one which had surged through these streets to the nearby Salpêtrière one night in September 1792. Now one of the biggest hospitals in Europe, the Salpêtrière was then both a prison and a centre for the insane and the poor. Staring at its columned entrance, Julia found it hard to imagine that it had once been the scene of a horrific massacre in which over forty prostitutes had been butchered, and that this act of carnage had been repeated in several other prisons throughout the city on the same night.

She walked on. Outside an art shop a party had spilled out onto the pavement; women in black dresses and men in dinner jackets and bow ties were sipping champagne, laughing and talking. A young waiter held out a tray of glasses to Julia as she picked her way among the small crowd; on an impulse, she took it and joined in. A tall, pinched woman turned to her with a disdainful pout and said, ‘He’ll only sell paintings he believes are good. Very laudable, but he won’t last. Isn’t that so?’

‘Of course he won’t last,’ said her companion, an untidy woman with short black hair. ‘Art is a business like anything else. It’s the accountant you answer to. Are you an artist?’ she asked Julia. ‘You look like an artist.’

‘No, I’m just a student. But I think he’s very brave.’ She finished her champagne and hurried on; she had arranged to arrive at seven and didn’t want to be late. She’d put on her best trousers and jacket; Carmen had sounded very proper. A nearby clock was chiming the hour as she rang the bell at the street-level entrance.

‘I’m on the fifth floor. The lift’s broken again so you’ll have to use the stairs.’

Carmen kissed Julia on both cheeks at the door of her apartment. She was short and plump, sixty-ish, with a neat grey bob.

‘Come in, sit down. Can I offer you a little aperitif?’ She disappeared into the kitchen and returned with a bottle of Taittinger. Laughing at Julia’s look of surprise, she said, ‘My doctor would say it’s my age. But why make do with milk when you can have cream? Well, there are some pleasures one can’t have and others one can. Champagne, silk underwear, poetry. Not necessarily in that order.’ She uncorked the bottle and poured into two crystal flutes.

‘To scholarship,’ she said, sitting in a red velvet arm-chair.

Julia watched the tiny bubbles rising unhurriedly through the pale-gold liquid. The room was small, full of books and very tidy. Through a pair of glass doors she could see the keyboard of a baby grand piano.

‘You said you’d found a diary written by Manon de Saint-Gilles.’

‘A sort of diary. More a collection of reminiscences. All written on loose sheets.’

‘How did you come across it?’

‘I was searching the archive of the Bertillon museum a couple of years back, for a project I was working on. I came across papers written by Manon de Lessac.’

‘De Lessac?’

‘Yes. She changed her name from Saint-Gilles when she came to Paris.’

‘When was that?’

‘Around 1819. She calls herself an old woman, though she wasn’t yet fifty. The diary wasn’t relevant to my work at the time, but I meant to return to it later, just out of interest. Then my mother was very ill and I had to travel to Pau to look after her and I forgot all about it. But a few weeks ago I had lunch with Véronique – you met her at the Society – and it just came up in the conversation, you know how things do – and she mentioned your research. I recognized the name Saint-Gilles, though it’s only mentioned once or twice. They allowed me to copy a few pages, which I can give you now – though the quality is rather poor. The rest is in the museum. Have

you got your application filled in? You'll need a signature; they won't let you in without one.'

'Mathias is going to sign it for me in the morning. What were you working on?'

'I was looking at a woman of the revolutionary period called Virginie de Laroche. She was a minor aristocrat, not important politically, not a mover or shaker. She emigrated to England but returned in 1799. She was a friend of Manon, mentions her in her own diary. They were both single: Manon had never married; Virginie's husband had stayed in France to try and salvage some of his property, then he was caught trying to escape in 1793 and guillotined. The family fortune was lost. Virginie was awarded a small pension by Napoleon in 1803.'

'What does she say about Manon?'

'Not a great deal; they're just passing references – dinners, walks in the park, that sort of thing. But once she says, "I worry about Manon, she gets thinner by the day, as if something were eating her from the inside." That sentence struck me.'

'Manon does seem to have been very intense. She says she has missed her destiny.'

'Well, it happens. More often than you think. The Paris diary is full of regret and defiance. She says she's trodden a crooked path. A woman after my own heart. Have you eaten?'

'No. I'll have dinner in the hotel later.'

'I can offer you a horse steak – unless you're fussy about eating horse? I know the English aren't too keen on it.'

'I don't have a problem with it. That's very kind.'

They ate in the room with the piano, which looked down onto the street below. Carmen served the horse steaks with steamed potatoes, followed by a green salad and a fromage blanc.

Julia said, 'You know that an earlier diary written by Manon is in the university archive at Poitiers?'

'No?'

'Yes. I saw it last summer. With Mathias Fournier. You'd find it very interesting. It dates from 1794. I'm hoping the later diary will throw some light on what happened then.'

'How did you get access to the Poitiers archives?'

'Mathias knows someone there: she was called Hélène.'

‘Hélène Pasquier?’

‘Yes. You know her?’

‘I know of her. That little circle is rather incestuous; everyone knows everyone else’s business – or at least the version of it they want to make known. I suppose he told you his sob-story about Hélène?’

‘I suppose he did.’

‘Like his uncle, he has a charming exterior but … Well, perhaps I’ve said enough – and in any case, you look like the sort of young woman who can look after herself. It took me a long time to learn that. How did you get involved with the Society of the Fifteenth of December?’

‘Someone I work with is an old friend of Jean-Michel.’

‘I thought you were a student.’

‘I am. I teach part-time to fund my studies.’

‘My God! That can’t be easy. What’s your impression of the Society?’

‘I enjoyed it. I liked the ambience; I felt at home.’

‘You won’t say that once you’ve got to know them! Beneath the surface it’s a huge subaquean pantomime, full of undercurrents and animosities.’

‘I’ve not seen any of that. I only attended once.’

‘Perhaps all groups are the same. That’s what I stay away from, I think; I can’t cope any more with the exhausting tedium of failed liaisons.’

It was late when Julia reached her hotel, but she was determined before she went to bed to read at least some of what Carmen had given her. She bought a bottle of water in the hotel bar and took it to her room.

2nd March 1819

I, Manon de Lessac, write this. Manon de Saint-Gilles exists no longer. A new name for a new self. Now at last in Paris. Free.

For the past twenty years I have written nothing save a few desultory letters. Once, long ago, I kept a diary, but abandoned it. (Had I been a man, that summer, I should have run away and joined the army, sought a bloody and violent death; but I stayed where I was, pretending all was well. Always, until now, I have stayed where I was and pretended all was well.)

Upon this writing table stands a ream of thick, creamy paper, delivered by the boy from the papeterie on the rue Saint-Jacques. In these pages I will stand at a crossroads, circling, looking first one way and then another; into past and future, inspecting both my own soul and the world around me.

People think I am insane. I see their looks, hear their whispers, though they are too polite to voice their thoughts. But so many lives were blighted during those years when the whole country went mad, that to be a little strange these days is perhaps excusable, as long as it is not too conspicuous. And they are perhaps right. I no longer know what sanity entails; there is a fury in me which will not go away. I am unable to sink gracefully into old age like the staid old aunts I see in the salons; I revolt against that. My outward serenity is artificial, a silk mantle thrown over a tattered dress. Life has passed me by, it has sent me down crooked paths, and now I cannot let it go. A dried-out husk, I still clamour for experience.

3rd March – These large sheets of paper rustle invitingly. Yet I wonder: what is the attraction of writing down the past? Is it not to relive it, to bring back the pain and the horror? Or is it to impose an order which was lacking in the events themselves, and thus in some sense to master them? When I am dead, these papers will pass to Raoul, my only living relative; how will he judge them? Will he so much as look at them? I imagine them sitting thick with dust in his hands, perhaps falling on the floor in disarray, their order lost. And would that be such a disaster? Though my subject is the fixed and immutable past, yet in memory one may move back and forth through time. Perhaps, then, these sheets may be rearranged, like the shapes in a kaleidoscope, into any number of patterns. (Can beauty ever be fashioned out of ugliness, light out of darkness?)

I can perhaps in any case make only a small claim for the accuracy of my account, since I recollect these events at a distance of twenty-five years. Moreover, I am not the same woman I was in 1794. Perhaps I have been several, each with her own view, her own muffled voice. A relict of a past time. Like this country, I have seen great upheavals – storms which have whipped up all sorts of litter and debris. Dashed hopes, a lost opportunity.

France herself lost her opportunity, exchanged a king for an emperor – like a woman who escapes a tyrant father only to marry a tyrant husband. And now we have a king again – another Bourbon, one so fat that he has to be carried from room to room.

I must admit, however, that my present situation is advantageous. I have a little wealth and a position in society, which allow me a few scattered pleasures: this house,

the theatre, music, fine silks which caress my withering skin. And Mme du Plessis's salon where, if I do not find friendship, I at least find conversation of an agreeable nature.

5th March.

Outside my window, the leaves of the plane tree begin to open. The evening is warm and serene and the contrast is not lost on me between the springtime of the year and my personal, implacable, autumn. I have many fewer years left to live than I have yet lived – a thought which alternately enrages and comforts me. My joints ache, my hands and legs are often stiff. My body is in turmoil. Each morning when I look in the glass I ask, Where has my life gone? The face which looks back at me is that of a stranger. Where has she come from, this old woman with the grey hair, her cheeks lined and sunken? This is not me. I am the black-haired girl, tall and ungainly perhaps, but lithe and vigorous; the girl who ran tireless in the meadows of Ruffec, her face sweating in the summer heat. It is that girl's heart which beats beneath these sagging breasts.

My life has been a small part in a mediocre play. But I have no one to blame but myself. When the one great opportunity of my life presented itself, still I play-acted. Even with him I dissembled; a mistake which cost me my happiness. Was I cursed, that I could not show what I truly felt?

I am incapable of turning away from that time. My life is a clock which stopped one July day in 1794.

2nd April 1819

Am I a monster? I ponder this question tonight, as I sit at my small table looking out onto the quiet street below, where branches waft in the breeze. I did great harm to my sister, and to her lover, for which I can never make amends. I took the letters he sent her, and burnt them, and she thought he had forgotten her.

This house, which I have rented from Mlle du Canche, a favourite at the Comédie Française, is perfect for our small household – myself and Raoul and our few servants. Neither too large nor too small, it has a fine view over the Luxembourg gardens, as well as a large salon, the only imperfection of which is that its walls are hung with large, full-length mirrors. What cruelty! – I have had them draped in thick muslin; otherwise at every turn I would catch an unnerving glimpse of myself, head to foot, back and front. (It is a dizzying effect when one stands between two mirrors and sees the reflections pour back and forth, on and on, without end.)

7th April

The melancholy is acute tonight. Raoul is in Caen, on business for the Prefect. I have told the servants not to disturb me; have shut myself away in this small room to which I flee when I can no longer bear the society of others. I am unable to think for the shrieking in my head. My mind bristles with stabbing memories. I will set them down at random, as they occur – what does it matter? There is no one to read these pages, after all.

Time has passed too quickly – and I have done none of the great things I dreamed of. I lived through tumultuous times, yet had no part in them.

My brother and sister both long dead.

I cannot forget the despairing horror with which I watched him ride away that morning in July, 1794, the aching screaming 'No' which formed in my mind, the knowledge that I would never see him again. It is a despair which has hardly receded with the years.

Rosine and I were never close; we had nothing in common except our parentage. Nonetheless, her death was a shock, and it brought forth a flood of guilt which perhaps I ought to have experienced sooner. Never will I be able to expiate the wrong I did her. My nephew has no inkling of my part in his mother's tragedy – which is also his own – and I dare not jeopardize his regard by a confession. With my meagre fortune he might also inherit the truth. I leave that to chance – it will depend entirely on whether or not he reads these notes. For now, it is enough that he lives with me, accompanies me from time to time to the theatre, walks with me in the gardens of the Luxembourg.

Henri, whom I loved, also went away, left me and the child at Ruffec. I pleaded with him not to go; but he was stubborn. All the Saint-Gilles were stubborn.

Though I had not seen him since he left for England – almost five years – and had received no communication from him – I was struck down by the news of his death. I did not leave my bed for weeks. Is that what he had been doing, all those years? Affairs of state, he said. Spying, it turns out.

Julia looked at her watch. One o'clock. She'd arranged to meet Fournier in his office at nine the next morning. She looked quickly over her application form for the Museum archive and went to bed.

46.

‘You did say cappuccino with two sugars, didn’t you?’ she said, placing the cardboard cup on Mathias Fournier’s desk at five to nine the next morning. He was sitting behind the desk with his cello, picking out a dissonant pizzicato which didn’t stop when she addressed him. She looked round and said, ‘You’ve had a big tidy-up since I was last here.’

He chuckled. ‘When you came last, I was clearing out ready for the decorators to come in. This is the way it usually is. Every book in its place, arranged in exact order. My order,’ he said, following her gaze to the bookcases; ‘thematic, not by author or title. The order I can work best with.’

‘And can you find them when you want them?’

‘Of course. Well, mostly. How do you arrange yours?’

‘It’s complicated. I do it by themes, too – books relating to a particular project or aspect of a project. So it changes a lot. But the whole arrangement has to look right on the shelves as well, so there’s a certain amount of randomness. And yes, I can find them, but no one else could.’

‘How did you get on with Carmen last night?’

‘Oh, we had a good chat. I stayed to dinner. The bit of Manon’s diary she gave me was interesting. I read it when I got back to the hotel.’

As she talked, he continued to pluck the cello strings. ‘Did it reveal anything?’

She slung her briefcase on the floor, sat down on the chair opposite his desk.

‘It gave some hints of things that had gone on. But the strangest thing is that Raoul is still alive in 1819.’

‘Raoul Akermann?’

‘No. Raoul Akermann was Richard Turnbull. You are listening?’ He looked up and nodded. She took a sip of her cappuccino. ‘Raoul de Saint-Gilles. Rosine’s son, Manon’s nephew. Richard Turnbull’s son, come to that. He was living with his aunt in Paris in 1819.’

‘And why is it strange that he should be alive then?’

‘Because Richard Turnbull seems to have thought he was dead. Apparently, in the course of the same conversation, Henri de Saint-Gilles told him of both Raoul’s existence and his death.’

‘When did Saint-Gilles say that?’

‘I’m not sure. But it must have been between 1810, when Turnbull arrived in London, and the beginning of 1813, when Saint-Gilles was executed. Turnbull says Saint-Gilles blurted out both facts “that afternoon of fury”, so I’d hazard a guess that it was when the whole spy thing blew up in late 1812.’

‘So he was either mistaken or lying.’

‘Most likely the latter. He’d hardly be mistaken, would he? Not about his own nephew?’

‘But why tell an untruth?’

‘Perhaps to hurt Turnbull, or to stop him trying to get in touch with his son; I don’t know.’

He picked out a chromatic scale which brought back memories of her old school music room. Her eyes wandered round the office; pinned to a bookcase was a small sheet of paper with a handwritten quotation:

> To ring true, with a pure, authentic sound. Nearly all the people I have known ring false. To be worth exactly what one seems to be worth – not to try to seem to be worth more. … One wants to deceive people, and one is so much occupied with seeming, that one ends by not knowing what one really is.

‘André Gide,’ he said.

‘*The Counterfeiters*.’ She smiled. ‘Though to be honest, I don’t think anyone can ring true. I think the human personality is so complex that a unitary authenticity is impossible. But coming back to Richard Turnbull, the odd thing is that Peter Marchmont – the man I told you about – was actually right about Raoul de Saint-Gilles living into adulthood.’

‘And why is that so odd?’

‘Because he reckons it was part of what he sees as a systematic dissimulation by Turnbull. He believes Turnbull’s writings cover up the truth in order to implicate Saint-Gilles; that Saint-Gilles was innocent and Turnbull himself the spy. There’s no doubt that to some extent Turnbull is an unreliable narrator, but I think it’s totally far-fetched to see all his disparate and random writings as a joined-up effort to put forward an alternative version of events. So I’d sort of dismissed what Marchmont said about Raoul because of that.’

‘A tough one. Perhaps the rest of the diary will shed some light on the matter. Was there anything else of interest?’

‘Manon confesses to destroying the letters Richard Turnbull wrote to Rosine after he left Ruffec. She says they had nothing in common except their parentage.’

‘I expect half the population of France could say the same thing. Myself included.’

‘Strange things, families. Very different personalities thrown together by genetics and expected to get on. Have you got brothers and sisters?’

‘Just one sister. She’s an accountant. In San Diego.’

‘Not much like you, then.’

‘No. We get on superficially; there’s no aggression between us, but little intimacy either. She’s not got much time for what I do; the research, at any rate. The teaching’s OK, because it’s a respected profession; and it trains up young people to get degrees and jobs and earn money and contribute to the national economy. But that’s not the reason I do it.’

‘Why do you do it?’

‘To impart the passion for finding things out. Because thinking, real thinking, is a subversive activity.’ He picked up his bow, which was lying across the desk, and hammered out a minor scale at top speed, three octaves up and down. ‘And that, I would say,’ he said into the sudden silence that followed, ‘is the duty of intellectuals. To cut across the chains of convention.’

‘And yet you’re conventionally successful.’

‘By which you mean I’m wealthy? Some of that comes from my parents.’

‘Not just that. You’ve written umpteen articles and six scholarly books, two of which have been very well received.’

‘In academic circles, perhaps. How did you know that?’

‘I’m not a researcher for nothing, you know. Well, actually, I just googled you.’

He repeated the scale, which he finished with a flourish of his arm. ‘Now you,’ he said, laying the bow down on the desk again, ‘look to me like an only child. Like your Turnbull.’

‘Turnbull. In English the stress is on the first syllable, not the second. You make him sound like an Amerindian chief.’

He grinned, the skin wrinkling round his brown eyes. ‘Turnbull.’

‘That’s very perceptive,’ she said, ‘but why do you say so?’

‘Because you are so quietly determined and confident, self-sufficient in some ways. Am I right?’

‘Yes,’ she said, taking the last mouthful of her coffee. ‘I am an only child. But I shouldn’t have been; my twin died at birth.’

‘How terrible; I’m sorry.’

‘Well, it’s not something that affects me now, at least not consciously. I do have a recurring dream, though – a paralysis nightmare – which I think relates to that experience. There’s always a dead baby at the back of it. I sometimes wonder if I might have been responsible for her death.’

‘In what way?’

‘I don’t know. I might have smothered her; not deliberately, but bodies can get pretty tangled up in that small space. And in the *débâcle* of birth anything could happen, couldn’t it? The birth canal is still one of the most dangerous of places.’

‘What does your mother say about it?’

‘If my mother had had her way, I’d still be ignorant of the whole thing.’ She tossed her cardboard cup into his waste-paper bin. ‘Now that did have an effect on me; in a way, it was my first research project. I had to winkle it out of her.’

‘And you applied to that the same *acharnement* you apply to all the other things in life which matter to you?’

‘I think it was there that the *acharnement* was born.’

‘And how did you get at the truth?’

She leant back in her seat. ‘I always knew there was something they weren’t telling me. A gut feeling, an instinct. Over the years I put two and two together. One day when I was about fifteen I came home from school and confronted her. She was sitting quietly reading the paper; I just walked up to her and said that either she told me what had happened or I’d leave home that evening. She still didn’t want to tell me – she cried – but I insisted. I wasn’t very nice at that age. So in the end she told me. But even then only the barest details.’

‘And would you have left home?’

‘Who knows? I hadn’t thought that far – I suppose failure wasn’t an option.’

‘It must have been very upsetting for your mother. Having a baby who died.’

‘Terribly so. But I could have shared it. Instead she shut me out. And it was my story too, my history.’

‘Why do you think they didn’t tell you?’

‘To protect me, I suppose. But it’s far more hurtful to withhold the truth, isn’t it?’ She took from her briefcase the three-page application form for the Bertillon Museum archive. ‘It took me forty-five minutes to fill this in. You’d think I was applying for an internship at MI5. Or whatever it is in France.’

‘The DCRI,’ he said, leaning the cello against the bookcase behind his desk. ‘Welcome to French bureaucracy.’ He glanced over the form.

‘Shall I pick you up this evening? You’ve not forgotten the Society meeting?’

‘How could I forget? That’s kind, but actually I’d prefer to walk.’

‘I’ll pick you up on foot, then. Unless you’d rather walk on your own.’ He took his fountain pen from his inside pocket and signed the form.

‘No, that would be good; as long as it’s not out of your way. Seven-thirty in the hotel foyer?’

‘I think I’ve signed in all the right places.’ Carefully, he screwed the cap back onto his pen and handed her the form. ‘Seven-thirty, then.’

‘Merci beaucoup. A bientôt.’ She shook his hand, picked up her briefcase and hurried down the staircase.

She was issued with a three-day pass at the Bertillon Museum. The receptionist, an elderly aristocratic-looking lady dressed in a woollen suit and brown brogues which nonetheless had an air of negligent chic, took Julia up to a stuffy little room on the third floor. ‘The reading room. You may sit at either table,’ she said, sternly. ‘No eating, drinking or smoking. Photocopying is not permitted. The librarian will bring you the papers from the archive.’ Julia removed her raincoat and sat by the window. Ten minutes later another unsmiling elderly woman brought her a stack of loose sheets of paper.

30th April 1819

I had long suspected that Henri was mixed up in something nasty. It was not only the danger we faced that made Father leave Paris; though I was unaware of it at the time, it was also an attempt to wean Henri from his involvement with radicals and revolutionaries. But Henri refused to stay at Ruffec and returned to Paris against Father’s will. He cared nothing, of course, for the threat of disinheritance; he was embarrassed by his wealth and had promised it to the *patrie*. Aristocracy, he said, was a scar on the face of France. He despised the old order, accepted the new without

question or doubt. In his eyes it was a simple matter: the people, those who did real work for the good of the country, deserved to share in its riches; those who contributed nothing should be eradicated.

And even the mad time, the Terror, did not diminish his enthusiasm. A few deaths, he said, are nothing compared to the good that will result once the country is cleansed of tyrants and traitors. Counter-revolutionaries must be weeded out like couch-grass. After Robespierre's fall, he returned to Ruffec – I suspect he had to remain hidden for a time – but it was not long before he was back in Paris once more; he threw his weight behind the Directory, then behind the Emperor, whom he adored – this is the strong leader France has need of, he said. And his devotion was well rewarded. He took employment in the local government, and thus spent more time at Ruffec – in order, I think, to keep an eye on Rosine and me.

They are all gone, and I am left alone.

Except for my young gauche Raoul.

My young gauche Raoul, my consolation, who so resembles his father: the same dark hair and piercing blue eyes. He treats me with compassion; he does not know who I am. In his eyes, I am merely his aunt Manon, who has doted on him all his life.

What must it be like to bear a son, the child of a man one loves; to hold in one's arms that tiny hybrid being?

12th September, 1819

It strikes me that – apart from those sweet fierce days when I loved for the first and only time – I was only truly happy as a child, before the onset of puberty. Is it an unrealistic hope that, coming out of that time, I might find peace once more?

I do not know who I am. I see around me stout matrons, mères de famille, wives, mistresses; women who know exactly who they are, what they have achieved in life and what their place is henceforth, as if the spreading of their waists is merely an expected stage in a journey mapped out in advance. Yet what am I? Uneasy aunt to a resentful young man. I do not even resemble other women of my age. Maman used to say, 'You will fill out, after you have had a child.' But I am still tall and stick-like, I still stride in an unladylike way. I hear her voice: 'Manon, do try to tread more daintily! You look like a woman of the street!'

But O how fierce the heart which pounds in my breast, how thick the blood in my arteries, how hungry the mind which inhabits this haggard body!

30th September

I have lived now in Paris for a year, and my life has become one of peaceful routine and small pleasures. If I keep my eyes averted from a certain direction, all is well; if I do not, the demon returns. I try hard to draw a line under my previous life, its frustrations and disappointments – that life in which I was always at the periphery, even of my own story.

Poor Henri! Not only did father make his life disagreeable because of his support of the revolution, but I was a thorn in his side too. In Paris I kept a close eye on him – I knew there was something afoot. He could never hide things from me. I knew him better than anyone; we had been special companions when we were younger; I always knew when he was deceiving me. (I would have made a better spy than he! Brought up to hide my feelings, to put on an air of cheerfulness even when I was ripped apart by boredom and disappointment, the agony of rejection.)

The American was mixed up in it too. He called frequently at the house in the rue de Richelieu; always alone, always after dark. Their business was private, and I was excluded; but I suspected that he was trying to force Henri into something, or persuade him of something. Though outwardly full of charm, unctuous even, he was a brutal man. One evening, his arrival at the house had forced me to leave Henri's study, and I had lingered a while on the stairs, hoping to overhear a word or two of their conversation. Later, while I was standing by the window of the salon, he came up behind me and told me I had best keep my nose out of other people's business. His whisper more menacing than the clash of a sans-culotte's pike.

It has occurred to me since that time that we were perhaps protected from the turmoil taking place during those years, in the provinces as in the capital. Had Henri something to do with that? Had he promised his inheritance and his lands as long as Ruffec was left in peace? I do not know. It would perhaps have been an impossible bargain; for there were mobs on both sides who took the law into their own hands and cared little for government of any sort.

15th December

Like the rain which has not stopped for days but goes on and on, so the past torments me. A ceaseless patter on the window panes, the streets damp, the hem of my gown

muddy, my joints cold and aching despite the fires I have had lit. So many regrets, so much resentment. Anger and sadness; my best years wasted, no second chances. An ageing spinster, a nobody. The time of adventure – both great and small – has passed, the gap of possibility closed up.

But the past, my nephew tells me when we walk in the gardens of the Luxembourg and talk of such matters, is a footprint set in stone. Since it cannot be changed, we must accept it and move on. Would that I had his detachment!

Henri tried to force me to reveal the identity of Rosine's lover, but I refused to do so unless he gave me something in return. I asked him to settle a house on me; nothing large or luxurious, just a house in Paris – or even Poitiers – where I could live alone, away from dreary Ruffec. But he would not. One night we argued bitterly. It was in November, after Rosine's departure for the Ile d'Oléron. I dismissed Jean-François and took Henri his evening bottle of wine. I told him I might reveal the truth if he would tell me what he had been doing in Paris. I am not sure now why it was so important. Something had taken hold of me; I was angry, I suppose, at being always kept in the dark, always on the sidelines. But Henri became violently angry; he shouted, and knocked over the bottle of wine. I thought perhaps he would strike me, though I was not afraid. 'Never, never, never ask me about that time,' he shouted. 'It is done, finished, for ever.' Then he stormed from the room.

But in the end I gave him for nothing the information I had withheld for so long. Her death shocked me; it was as if I had killed her, and I imposed upon myself the penance of staying at Ruffec. But I was weary also of my quarrel with Henri, and thought perhaps that, were he ever to find the boy's father – an unlikely event given the protracted war with England – he would be lenient towards him.

I will never now return to Ruffec. It represents that life I have turned my back on, a life full of painful associations. I have made the château and its lands over to Raoul, and he visits it occasionally, in the summer. It is here in Paris that I belong; this is where I should have been all those years ago, when history was being made. A foolish notion, perhaps – it was, after all, a dangerous time, especially for one of aristocratic birth – but languor and boredom, the dull repetition of meaningless routines, are also dangerous – if not to our bodies, then in other, less obvious ways. I have often felt so imprisoned in my life, that I have wished I might do some great harm to myself; as if my body were my gaoler, or the bars across the window of my cell.

I have new spectacles, from a gentleman recommended to me by Mme de Laroche. I can now read for longer; my writing appears clearer. It is perhaps too much to ask that

my view of the past will be likewise clarified. I asked M. Dupin how they work and he explained to me, patiently, as if I were a child, drawing a diagram upon a sheet of paper – 'a lens, shaped thus, which draws the rays of light to a focus, here'. He appeared slightly bemused, as if my question disconcerted him; as if to ask for an explanation was tantamount to disbelief. He did not understand the nature of my request.

So much to learn. So much I could have learnt, and did not. I thought of M. Hébert, who would have delighted in explaining such a thing to me. Poor man! Found murdered in his own house that same terrible year. It was thought he was killed by a group of royalists who assumed he was related to the Parisian Hébert, founder of that unsavoury journal the *Père Duchesne.* Such idiocy! Even had they been related, would that have meant they were of the same nature? Rosine and I were sisters, of the same womb, yet how different we were. (Through such actions the mob reveal their unfitness for power.)

All my friendships are stillborn foetuses, never brought to term.

She forgave me everything, before she died. She knew then – because I had told her – the part I had played in their quarrel; but thanked me for not revealing his name.

The realisation was not a slow one. I had seen him, from the drawing-room window, walking down the linden alley with her. Later I heard them talking, arranging to meet, the tone of his voice a death-knell. I felt that my heart would break. (Stupid woman, to think that such a man could ever be interested in me. Pitifully thin, sharp-nosed, caustic.)

Yet he had liked me. I am sure of that.

20th December

I think it possible that Henri had been a spy long before he went to England. I refer to his second, final, trip to that country, after Rosine's death. He had been there before, of course (I know, because he told me – we were still close then). 1792, it was – or '93; my memory fails me at times and I become confused. I remember it was early in the year, the earth still in the grip of a harsh winter, between the execution of Louis and the declaration of war on England. A matter of state, he said; I was to tell no-one. He said there were those in England who saw in our Revolution a harbinger of change in their own land, who wished to achieve the same there, by invasion if need be. I said to Henri then, how strange it was, to think of fat, beef-eating Englishmen longing for a French invasion. Yet *he* was an Englishman, though not a fat one, and had welcomed

the Revolution. (Was he too a spy, or is this a fanciful notion? To this day I have no idea what his business was in Ruffec that summer, and it never occurred to me to ask, so spellbound was I by his presence.)

I did not behave honourably. I was taken over by something monstrous, something bigger and stronger than myself. There was a letter hidden in the most secret pocket of his greatcoat, addressed to Robert, in English, and signed by one Anna Turnbull. I found it while they were walking outside; a long, hot, tormenting afternoon. I hated them both, by then. Later I told Rosine about the letter, which I had managed with some difficulty to decipher. That he was not an Alsatian but an Englishman, an enemy of the patrie. That he had a wife in England, who had abandoned him, and a child named Richard; that he had told us an untruth and was not who he claimed to be. How I goaded her! I watched her collapse like a slashed Montgolfier which plummets to earth empty of air. I am not sure if she repeated to him all the details I had given her – or if she told him I had searched his coat – but they quarrelled over it, which was exactly the outcome I had desired. But I had not bargained for that other outcome: two days later – which also happened to be the day on which news of Thermidor reached us – he rode away, on the same black gelding he had arrived with. Neither of us saw him again. We each watched him disappear down the gravel drive, she from the window of her room and I from mine. I can say of this only that I – being one storey higher – must have had the last glimpse of him.

47.

The trial of Henri Jacques de Saint-Gilles, for High Treason
30th January 1813
XI.

Mr Solicitor-General:	And how did you proceed after your forced entry into the house in Litchfield-street?
Richard Turnbull:	I turned my attention upon an itinerant preacher named Ezekiel Juggins.
Mr Solicitor-General:	For what reason?
Richard Turnbull:	He visited the house regularly. I assumed he brought intelligence.
Mr Solicitor-General:	You already knew his name?

Richard Turnbull: It was easy enough to find it out. His description was known on street-corners and in low taverns; he was instantly recognisable. His style of dress was distinctive; he habitually wore an old tattered greatcoat of which the pockets were torn, covered over with an equally ragged black cloak.

Mr Solicitor-General: Even in the month of July?

Richard Turnbull: They never left his back, even in the hottest of weathers. The soldiers of the Dover garrison said it was because he was an emissary from hell and thus unused to the English climate. But his appearance was distinctive also: he was a tall man and well-built, with a large moon-face which made him look benign and innocent but which belied a shifty character and an iron-willed arrogance.

Mr Solicitor-General: And what did you discover about this preacher?

Richard Turnbull: In short, that he had connexions with the house in Litchfield-street, but that he brought little intelligence. In either sense of the word.

Mr Solicitor-General: What was the nature of his business, in that case?

Richard Turnbull: He kept two houses for girls and women whom he had converted.

Mr Solicitor-General: He preached only to girls and women?

Richard Turnbull: He preached to all. But the men whose souls he saved were saved by their act of faith, and free to enjoy both earthly felicity while they lived and heavenly bliss when they passed into immortality. Womankind, however, according to Juggins, had to earn its salvation. Doubly fallen, doubly damned, he said; therefore they must earn their redemption.

Mr Solicitor-General: Be brief if you please, Mr Turnbull; we will pass over this man’s dubious non-conformism, and the perhaps dubious actuality of a woman’s soul.

Richard Turnbull: In short, in order to achieve their redemption, some of the girls and women of whose salvation he was the instrument were encouraged to work for their living by less than spiritual means.

Mr Solicitor-General: And by that you mean what, exactly?

Richard Turnbull: He hired out the girls he kept at the mission.

Mr Solicitor-General: He ran a bawdy-house?

Richard Turnbull: That, but not only that. His girls were hired out for any purpose whatsoever. For a handsome fee, of course. Giroudet and Dubois at the Litchfield-street house availed themselves of young flesh which arrived on their doorstep of its own volition. LeConte, however, merely wanted a succession of obedient girls or women who could keep house and run errands for him without asking questions or drawing attention to the house.

Mr Solicitor-General: Why girls in succession, do you think?

Richard Turnbull: I presume so that none could then ascertain what took place there.

Mr Solicitor-General: This Juggins was a hypocrite, then, if what you say is true.

Richard Turnbull: One of the greatest I have ever known.

Mr Solicitor-General: Did you not think it strange that he should be involved with a French spy?

Richard Turnbull: It was not inconsistent with his character, or with his view of the world.

Mr Solicitor-General: Please explain.

Richard Turnbull: Juggins held strange and unreasonable views. He was a man of enthusiasm who allowed his judgement to be clouded by fancies of his own making. He believed himself to be the emissary of God Almighty, put here on earth to bring about salvation for all. He believed that he alone was the recipient of truth, the Scriptures having been weakened by conventional religion. According to his dogma, the Almighty would within his own lifetime return to earth and sweep up to heaven all those Juggins had saved, with himself their ugly head.

Mr Solicitor-General: But that does not explain how this emissary of God – however befuddled and mistaken – came to be consorting with the irregular household of a French spy.

Richard Turnbull: He had an idea that the very notion of statehood was a falsity, a thing of the world; that all secular authority, whether Monarchy or Republic, was abhorrent in the eyes of God. The true state of heaven would only be established with the downfall of all nation states. It was apparently for

this reason – to subvert the state, as a symbol of all states – that he fancied himself a purveyor of secrets to the French.

Mr Solicitor-General: And where was the purpose in that, if the Almighty were already on his way? And was Buonaparte's France not a state also?

Richard Turnbull: They were his ideas, not mine. I do not purport to understand them. It is true, that he denounced both King George and Buonaparte as Antichrist.

Mr Solicitor-General: As you say, a man of muddle-headed ignorance. Why do you say he fancied himself as a spy?

Richard Turnbull: He acted only in a small way; I suspect he liked the idea more than the reality.

Mr Solicitor-General: But a man might hang for a small treason as for a large!

Richard Turnbull: He believed he had indemnity from the Almighty.

Mr Solicitor-General: You seem well-versed in these cracked notions; how came you by all this information?

Richard Turnbull: He told me freely while we were on the road of his millenarian beliefs, and of his views regarding the corruption of the state.

Mr Solicitor-General: You travelled together?

Richard Turnbull: We did. But I had followed him first to the garrison at Dover.

Mr Solicitor-General: This was when?

Richard Turnbull: Towards the end of July.

Mr Solicitor-General: And what took place there?

Richard Turnbull: He snooped about. He tried to preach to the soldiers. But he was as close as a lock; I could get no information from him. I therefore talked to some of the soldiers.

Mr Solicitor-General: And what did you learn from them?

Richard Turnbull: On the whole they disliked him.

Mr Solicitor-General: On what grounds?

Richard Turnbull: They said he was continually poking about, asking questions. They disliked his preaching. He tried to dissuade them from fighting and playing dice.

Mr Solicitor-General: And how came you to travel with Juggins after you had visited the garrison?

Richard Turnbull: I struck up an acquaintance with him, pretending to have an interest in his ideas. But at Portsmouth he gave me the slip and disappeared. I found out, however, that he intended to travel to the North.

Mr Solicitor-General: He told you this?

Richard Turnbull: I know the innkeeper of the Four Bells at Portsmouth. He told me Juggins had said that was where he was bound. I caught up with him at Didcot, lodged with him at the inn on the Oxford Road. I paid two ruffians to hold him captive and bring me his greatcoat, from which he was never parted.

Mr Solicitor-General: Did you discover anything of significance?

Richard Turnbull: I found papers on which he had written down information he had gathered at Dover and Portsmouth.

Mr Solicitor-General: Information of a sensitive nature?

Richard Turnbull: He might have thought so, but it was of a nature that any newspaper-man could have got hold of and published freely. As I said, Juggins was an informant more in the fancy than in the actuality. But I found other papers.

Mr Solicitor-General: What sort of papers?

Richard Turnbull: Some relating to his church; others which were destined for French prisoners of war held in the north of the country.

Mr Solicitor-General: Juggins was carrying papers to French prisoners in this country?

Richard Turnbull: That is so. They were mostly short notes, many unsealed, bringing news of a prisoner's family; that his mother was well, or his wife ill again of a fever.

Mr Solicitor-General: And these papers were all written in the spy's handwriting?

Richard Turnbull: No; they were all in different handwriting; a fact which appeared to confirm that they were personal messages.

Mr Solicitor-General: Are we therefore to assume, that as well as running a ring of spies, the prisoner was acting as a Post-Office for captive Frenchmen and their families?

Richard Turnbull: It is not impossible. It is easy enough, to use the same system for one and the other. Any sorts of documents might have been contained in the packets carried by Mr Barclay.

Mr Solicitor-General: And were there other documents in Juggins's coat?

Richard Turnbull: There were a few that were sealed.

Mr Solicitor-General:	How many?
Richard Turnbull:	Three, I think.
Mr Solicitor-General:	Can you describe the seal?
Richard Turnbull:	It was distinctive. It depicted two leaves of hawthorn.
Mr Solicitor-General:	The same seal that you had found in the locked drawer at number 7 Litchfield-street?
Richard Turnbull:	Yes, the same.
Mr Solicitor-General:	So the seal found upon the letters in Juggins's greatcoat pocket was identical to that which you had seen at Litchfield-street?
Richard Turnbull:	It was.

48.

'Julia, good to see you again,' said Jean-Michel when she arrived at five-to-eight at the flat in the rue de Tolbiac. 'I think you've met everybody except Paul.' He indicated a tall, gawky man with a velvet bow tie and straggly grey hair, who shook her hand warmly. 'Paul's area of interest is the ancient world, particularly the work of the Greek tragedians. Come and sit down; we're waiting for Mathias, as usual. A fine mind, my nephew, but never on time for anything. In the meantime, let me pour you some wine.'

'He is the only member of this Society who works for a living,' said Véronique, 'so I think we may be lenient.'

'And he's got to pick up the Sachertorte,' said Bernard.

'I only hope he remembers.'

'He'd just remembered at one-thirty this afternoon,' said Julia. 'We were going to walk up together, but he realized he had to go to the patisserie first.'

'Sachertorte?' asked Paul. 'Why a German dessert?'

'It's Viennese, in fact, but it was near enough and I wanted something with chocolate in it. I thought it appropriate since two of tonight's talks are on German subjects: Bernard is speaking on the Enigma Machine and Véronique on Hildegard of Bingen.'

'The connection being that women mystics are enigmas, I suppose?'

‘Then Julia’s going to give us a summary of her findings at the château Ruffec last summer.’

‘What is it anyway? Sachertorte, not the Enigma Machine.’

‘It’s a sort of chocolate gateau.’

‘Not very healthy, is it? Onion tart and Sachertorte.’

‘There’s salad if you want to be healthy. I think at our age we can afford to relax a little; death is stalking us anyway. Ah, here he is at last,’ said Jean-Michel as Mathias arrived carrying a large box which he placed on a side-table. He shook hands and sat in the empty space, opposite Julia.

‘We need to talk about Julia’s initiation,’ he said.

‘What initiation?’

The onion tart was passed round the table.

‘You said you wanted membership of the society. You can’t have membership without initiation.’

‘And what form does it take?’

‘We dip you in a cold bath,’ said Paul. ‘And then you have to talk for an hour on a subject you know nothing about.’

‘You’re joking.’

‘Of course he’s joking,’ said Bernard, reaching down the table for the wine bottle. ‘You have to bare your left forearm and draw from it enough blood to sign your name, with a quill pen, on the membership roll.’

‘At which point I reveal that I’m a spy from the rival society across the road.’

‘What rival society?’

‘I think Julia’s grasped,’ said Véronique, ‘that you’re all talking nonsense. Mathias, what are you having instead of onion tart?’

‘I bought myself a goat’s cheese and pepper *tartelette* from La Philosophie du Pain; they have the best savoury pastry in Paris. There is an initiation, though,’ he said, refilling Julia’s glass.

‘And that entails?’

‘You don’t know until the night itself. It’s different for everyone. Though I can’t remember the last time we had an initiation, can anyone?’

‘It was Marguerite’s, wasn’t it?’

‘I’d forgotten all about Marguerite. That must have been what? Four, five years now?’

‘What happened to her?’

‘She went to live in Lille to be near her daughter.’

‘God, what a place to go! But then she was a strange woman,’ said Jean-Michel. ‘Totally impervious to my charms. Don’t worry, Julia; you’re too young. For me at least.’

‘Can’t I be the judge of that?’

After her talk, Bernard asked Julia, ‘Do you think your man was a spy?’

‘It’s possible.’

‘You know the English were running a huge network of agents and counter-agents in France at the time of the Revolution and into the Napoleonic era? They were working with French royalists to bring down the Republican governments and put a king on the throne – either Louis XVIII or someone else.’

‘England is always meddling in other countries’ business,’ said Paul. ‘Like invading Iraq on the coat-tails of the USA.’

‘Actually,’ said Julia, ‘a lot of us in Britain weren’t in favour of that war. I have come across that espionage network; though I’ve found nothing that links Richard Turnbull with it directly.’

‘Why do people become spies?’ said Serge.

‘Some people thrive on a double life,’ said Jean-Michel.

Bernard frowned. ‘It’s different in wartime. The lines are more clear-cut.’

‘You can understand people becoming spies when they’re young,’ said Paul; ‘or because of a crisis. So people passed secrets to the Soviets in the thirties and forties, because Fascism was such a threat.’

‘Exactly. But when the truth about Communism came out – I mean, who in their right mind would carry on passing secrets to a régime which in practical terms was very little different from Fascism?’

‘But you get caught up in it. It’s not easy to stop being a spy, is it? There are practical consequences.’

‘And it’s hard to acknowledge that what you once believed in so fiercely, the values you held so dearly, aren’t as unequivocal and as pure as you thought them to be.’

‘But values are never are clear-cut, are they?’

‘But once you’ve gone down that path, it’s very hard to get off it.’

‘Will it matter, Julia, if you don’t find all the answers?’ asked Véronique.

‘Not to my PhD. I’ve got more than enough for my thesis.’

‘But,’ said Mathias.

‘But I’d like to find the answers.’

‘Material can always come to light,’ said Jean-Michel. ‘By the way, how was Mlle. Broussard?’

‘Very well. I liked her.’

‘She can put on a cheerful face when she wants to. A good job you didn’t catch her on a griping day.’

‘You just can’t get over the fact that she won’t forgive you for dumping her,’ said Véronique. ‘All those years ago.’

‘She’s the one who can’t get over it. Look at how she’s behaved for the past forty years.’

‘There’s more than one version to that story,’ said Véronique to Julia. ‘And you don’t need a historian’s brain to work that out.’

‘Yet at one level it’s very much like history,’ said Mathias, putting on his coat. ‘Versions of events, fiercely held and conflicting, which an outsider, like a historian, has to interpret. Julia, I know you said you’d rather walk, but I can give you a lift back to your hotel?’

‘When do you leave?’ he asked as he dropped her outside the Hôtel des Arènes.

‘The day after tomorrow. I should be finished at the Bertillon tomorrow. You mentioned dinner tomorrow evening?’

‘There’s a fine little restaurant five minutes from my flat.’

‘Great.’

‘Come and call for me. About seven?’ He tore a page from his notebook and wrote down his address. ‘It’s not far from Jean-Michel’s; turn left at the end of the rue Rollin. I’m on the fifth floor.’

49.

> This my last notebook – for I feel the approach of death, his hand on my shoulder. Yet even now I feel the difficulty of a full confession – My life, like my writings, scattered into a thousand fragments, which I struggle to gather into a single account.
>
> And am I not in any case impenitent? – a fact which renders a confession worthless. I set down the facts nonetheless.

Peter Marchmont put down his quill and stretched his arms; it was slow work and his fingers ached. But, he reflected as he moved to the sideboard under the sloping roof and took out a bottle of Cahors, it was a beneficial slowness. He half-filled a glass and lifted its delicate etched bowl to the candlelight.

Every night now for nearly a year he had plodded up to his dark and windowless study to work on Richard Turnbull's notebook. A big undertaking, but little by little it progressed. Two or three pages a night, before he got too tired and risked making mistakes. After that he reread the original documents, so that Turnbull's handwriting and his idioms were always there, in his mind. He read the works of Turnbull's contemporaries – Godwin, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Leigh Hunt, Hazlitt, Shelley – a constant bombardment of the language of the time.

This writing was perhaps the closest he would ever come to the age Henri had lived in; the age he, Peter, belonged in. He smiled and took a gulp of wine. Most of his customers, with whom he got on so well during the day, would be horrified if they knew what he got up to at night. Not so much because of the nature of his writing; a bit of forgery, for all its dubious status in the eyes of the law, could be forgiven. It had a romantic edge to it, a touch of Chatterton perhaps. But what would they say if they knew he was spending several hours each night in solitary communion with an obscure and long-dead Frenchman?

But Peter wasn't deluding himself. He knew – as Julia Dalton liked to keep reminding him – that there were probably more Turnbull documents scattered around the country; documents which might not be discovered for years. Anything could turn up. He also knew she hadn't shared with him everything she had. In the early days, especially, she'd been ungenerous; he could tell she was holding stuff back. But it didn't matter. It didn't matter because he knew the truth; Henri had told him,

and that was a higher form of evidence by far than any document. An eye-witness report, from the main protagonist. No need for interpretation or historical conjecture. A cast-iron account.

Future discoveries could be dealt with. Once his notebook was out there, in the public domain, it would be hard to discredit it. A Turnbull notebook, demonstrably authentic. What evidence could be brought to bear against it, given the fragmented and contradictory nature of Turnbull's other writings?

The only problem was that he couldn't reveal his source. He wasn't stupid; he knew the reaction he'd get: they'd laugh in his face, say he was mad, round the bend. Or – even worse – that he had 'issues with reality'. His work would be discredited. This was an age which trusted in the power of soundbites and photo-opportunities, which vomited out its inanities so forcefully that it had come to believe in them; but it had lost the ability to see the truth of a good, old-fashioned ghost. That in the church on the Common every Sunday there gathered people who sang hymns and prayed to a God-man who had risen from the dead seemed not to be a problem; but even they would be unlikely to accept Saint-Gilles as an authentic source. Despite the fact that, like their religion, the ghost's reality was a mystery that had been revealed to him. No; a more subtle tactic was called for.

It was in any case part of his agreement with Henri that his identity be kept secret, away from the prying and sceptic public gaze. 'It is you alone I have chosen,' Henri had said; 'I must remain hidden.' So many years ago now, those early meetings with the ghost; brief flashes of light in his otherwise dull and troublesome teenage years. Dust particles that re-assembled into light.

'Why have you chosen me?' he'd asked, one evening in early October as they walked across Regent's Park. Peter was on his way home from the school history society's annual lecture, which that year had been on the siege of Stalingrad. There had been drinks afterwards – orange and lemon squash – and a little food: cubes of cheese on sticks and Ritz crackers with savoury toppings. Peter hadn't stayed, though he was light-headed with hunger. As a rule he avoided such gatherings; he became tongue-tied, could think of nothing to say, knocked things over. Few of his contemporaries were sympathetic enough to include him in their conversations. But Saint-Gilles had materialized beside him as he slowed his step by the pond, smiling up at him. (Peter was already, at seventeen, taller than Henri.) He wished he could dress with Henri's elegance: the silk stockings creaseless, the striped cravat always

impeccably knotted. His own trousers were baggy and his blazer shiny with use, its royal blue fabric stained with ink and spilled tea.

‘The park is pleasant in the evenings at this time of year,’ said the ghost, ‘if a little cold.’

‘It’s pleasant all year,’ said Peter. ‘But especially in the autumn. Though I prefer it later, when the leaves have dropped and you know winter’s coming on. I feel like that all the time – as if winter’s about to come on.’ He threw his satchel to the ground and stood with his hands in his pockets, looking out over the water.

‘ “My way of life is fall’n into the sere,” ’ said Henri. ‘Do you know *Macbeth*?’

‘What a daft question! Better than any Frenchman.’

Henri smiled. ‘You forget that I have had many years to study your literature as well as my own. One hundred and fifty-nine, to be precise.’

‘Sorry. Actually, I do feel like that, sometimes. As if I’m approaching the end of my life even though it’s hardly begun. I sometimes feel it’s already degenerated so far that nothing worthwhile can ever come of it, that I’ll never achieve anything. Can you understand that?’

‘I can.’

‘I’m not real, you know,’ Peter blurted out, picking up his bag and walking on. Henri, once he had caught up with him, turned and smiled, a little smile of complicity and amusement.

‘I thought that was my line. It is precisely your reality that I am depending on.’

‘Oh, I don’t mean that. I know as well as you that I have a material existence in the material world. But I’m not a real person. Not like everybody else.’

‘And it is perhaps because of that that I have chosen you and not anybody else.’

So Peter worked on, for Henri’s sake. And at last, less than a year after he had begun, it was finished. He nodded to the empty chair opposite his, letting the quill slip onto the polished wood of the desk, and stroked the worn leather binding of the old notebook. ‘Well, old boy, we’ve got them now. Come what may.’

50.

Julia leant her head back and closed her eyes as the train sped across the French countryside. Two businessmen were talking loudly on mobile phones; a counterpoint of lead times, asset stripping, sales forecasts, reductions in complement. Further down the carriage a group of French students were playing a variant of strip-poker; two middle-aged English women across the aisle were painting their finger-nails while discussing in vivid detail the medical conditions of numerous friends and relatives.

She'd been reading the notes she'd taken from Manon's diary at the Bertillon museum; Manon's handwriting floated in her memory, page upon page of precise ascenders and descenders interspersed with the odd flourish which curled like the dark wisps of hair on Fournier's neck. She took from her notebook the sheet of paper on which he'd written his address the day before yesterday. Appartement 7, 75 rue du Cardinal Lemoine, 5^{e}. A fluent hand; the ink a vivid blue, verging on purple.

She'd rung the bell to his flat at seven o'clock precisely the previous evening.

'I'm running late; come in and have an aperitif while I clear up my things,' he'd said, leading her into a long, narrow room. 'It's my dining room but I work in here too. You don't mind the end of a bottle, do you? It seems a shame to waste it.'

'It's a beautiful room,' she said, taking a sip of wine. 'Very conducive to thought.' With its dark-oak glass-fronted bookcases and its long distressed table on which he had spread out books and notebooks and a laptop, it had the feel of an old library, both comforting and invigorating. She caught his eye. 'Yes, I am coveting your bookcases. I'd give my right arm to have a room like this. Do you often work at home?'

'Now and then. I shut the door and turn the phone off and concentrate on what I want to think about. The only problem is that I lose track of time; for which I apologize. I'll change my shirt and then we can go.'

She sat in a daze, listening to the traffic in the street below: a muted klaxon, the odd burst of acceleration; picked up one of the books on the table and leafed through it. *Histoire secrète de la révolution française*. It was hard to believe that streets like this one had once witnessed appalling violence, starvation and betrayal; that Richard Turnbull had sat in a room not dissimilar from this and talked with Henri de Saint-

Gilles about the Revolution and his family's part in it. Her thoughts turned to Fournier standing in front of a mirror fastening his cuff-links, the muscled sinuosity of his shoulders. She jumped when he reappeared.

'I'm going to have the tripes at Les Nourritures Terrestres,' he said in English as he ran down the stairs, jumping the last three. 'It's their speciality. What?' he said, looking up at her as she pulled a face. 'Don't you like tripes?'

'Tripe,' she said. 'In English it's singular. And no, I can't stand the stuff. It's so disgusting it's used figuratively in English to mean "rubbish"; did you know that?'

'No, but it won't change my opinion of it.'

'You're in a very cheerful mood tonight.'

'The prospect of tripe at the end of a hard day. And some intelligent conversation, of course.'

She spent her last few euros on a coffee from the buffet car and returned to her notes. One of the poker players shrieked and slapped the table. 'Royal flush! Off with those shirts.' She was finding it hard to concentrate.

'Was the diary worth coming for?' Fournier had asked her.

'Definitely.' She faced him over a candle which burned blue. 'It answers a couple of important questions. I'll have the salade de tomates, then the risotto de la mer, please,' she said to the waiter. 'I'd say it's clear that Saint-Gilles's sympathies lay with the Revolution; the later diary corroborates that. And Manon says she thinks he might have been a spy long before he went to England in 1810.'

'And the other question it clears up?'

'Manon tried to bargain a house in Paris out of Henri, in return for revealing the identity of Rosine's lover, but he refused. So she only told him after Rosine's death.'

'Which explains why Henri didn't go looking for Raoul Akermann until 1810.'

'Indeed. How's your tripe?'

'Excellent. You don't know what you're missing.'

'I always think of it as something old-fashioned and plebeian. My grandmother used to cook it in a white sauce with onions. It turned my stomach, but I ate it because she'd taken such care over it. Manon also owns up in her diary to engineering the quarrel between Richard Turnbull and her sister.'

'How did she do that?'

‘She found a letter hidden in his greatcoat pocket.’

‘She searched his pockets?’

‘While he was outside with Rosine.’

‘ “Nor hell a fury, like a woman scorned.” ’

‘You’re just showing off. Nobody gets that quotation right.’

‘Me? Would I show off? You have to admit that you’re impressed, though.’

‘Actually, I am. Though in my experience,’ she added with a grimace, ‘it’s men who create the biggest stink when they’re dumped.’

‘You have extensive experience of that, do you?’

‘A representative sample. Anyway, the letter was written by Anna Turnbull to her husband Robert. It made mention of their son Richard.’

‘So this Anna was,’ – he put down his fork – ‘Richard’s mother?’

‘That’s right. But when Manon read the letter, she assumed that Richard – whom she knew as Raoul Akermann – was Robert, that Anna was his wife and Richard their child. And it was that information that caused the rift between Rosine and Richard.’

‘Presumably the letter was undated.’

‘Either that or Manon was in too much of a fury to notice. But why Richard Turnbull should be carrying around a letter from his mother to his father, I have no idea.’

‘It must have been very important to him.’

‘Why do you say that?’

‘Because of the risk of carrying round a letter written in English. Unless he’d carried it round for so long that he’d forgotten he’d got it.’

‘No, that couldn’t be.’ She looked out of the window; it was getting dark. ‘He changed clothes more than once. He lived disguised as a sansculotte for a while, then on his way to Ruffec he stole another man’s clothes. So he must have been aware of the letter and transferred it from one set of clothes to another.’

She shook herself awake as they approached St Pancras. The students were putting their clothes back on; the three women had packed away their bottles of nail polish, their conversation turning from colostomy, tapeworm infection and leptospirosis to what they were going to cook for tea. Julia zipped her ball-point pen into her pencil case. There was more similarity between Manon’s handwriting and Fournier’s than

between hers and Richard Turnbull's. Curls and lines. Code and language. Arbitrary symbols, their significance established by convention. And over and above that the significance of the object itself: the diary, the letter, the sheet of paper torn from a notebook.

It was when she stood up to reach for her jacket from the overhead shelf that she realized. It had been staring her in the face all this time; how could she have been so stupid?

The night before, she'd almost confessed to Fournier how she had come by the notebook. They'd gone back to his flat and sat again at the old dining table. He opened another bottle of the Burgundy, tossing the cork to her over the table; she caught it in her outstretched left hand.

'Not drunk yet, then.' He took off his shoes and put his feet up on a chair.

'You probably wouldn't like me when I'm drunk. I'm either comatose or horribly argumentative. So make sure I'm in a taxi by midnight.'

'More argumentative than usual? Mon Dieu.' He looked intently at her for a moment, and she felt she was on the brink of a vertiginous descent.

'I've been thinking about Richard Turnbull in terms of wave-particle complementarity,' she said at last.

'Just remind me of that wave-particle thing. It's not my area of expertise.'

'Nor mine. I so wish I could be a polymath. Well, Feynman's double-slit experiment shows that all matter has both wave and particle properties.'

'OK. So?'

'So an accurate description of matter has to take into account both of those mutually exclusive attributes. But you can only see one at a time, depending on the sort of experiment you do.'

'The answers you get from nature depend on the questions you ask of it. Is that what you told me in July? We were on the bridge in Confolens, remember?'

'Yes, it was the day we'd discovered Richard Turnbull's letter. So, if you ask wave questions you get wave answers, and if you ask particle questions you get particle answers.'

'OK, so tell me how that relates to Richard Turnbull. But you're not to talk for longer than it takes me to drink one glass of wine.'

‘Not long, then. The basic problem with Richard Turnbull is: which side was he really on? Was he a radical or a government man? Was he some sort of double agent, or did he just change sides? Richard’s journal – or the bit of it I can read – seems to show that he was a radical. But that could possibly be a fiction, part of his construction of an undercover persona.’

‘So that’s the either-or scenario? Radical or government agent?’

‘Yes. But I’m wondering whether it’s possible he was both at the same time.’

‘A double agent?’

‘He might well have been a double agent, but that’s not really what I mean. A double agent is usually loyal to one side or another. I’m thinking in terms of an allegiance to both sides.’

‘But surely in real terms that makes no sense whatsoever?’

‘Possibly; but possibly not. There’s a sense in which he could have been both a loyal subject and a traitor. He’s a man of contradictions. He seems to be the sort of personality who has to be more than one thing at a time, even if those things are opposites. He seems to be truly ambiguous. I just wish I could read the rest of the journal; that might shed light on the matter.’

‘Why can’t you?’

‘It’s written in Greek.’

‘Can’t you get a translator?’

‘Yes, I’ll have to. I’ve stalled over it because … Because it would mean sharing the notebook with someone else.’

But in fact all she’d had to do was look at what was in front of her eyes. Look beneath the surface at the actual letters, instead of seeing them en masse and making an assumption.

Richard Turnbull’s Greek journal was not written in Greek at all, she was sure of it. It was a transliteration.

51.

The trial of Henri Jacques de Saint-Gilles, for High Treason

30th January 1813

XII.

Mr Solicitor-General: Mr Turnbull, what did you do after you had examined the papers taken from Ezekiel Juggins' greatcoat?

Richard Turnbull: I was about to return them, when I noticed that one of the seals was a little loose. I managed to prise it open in such a way that it might be invisibly resealed.

Mr Solicitor-General: And what did you find inside?

Richard Turnbull: There was reference to an event which would take place later in the year.

Mr Solicitor-General: What sort of event?

Richard Turnbull: It did not say; it merely referred to an event: 'un événement'.

Mr Solicitor-General: The letter was written in French?

Richard Turnbull: It was.

Mr Solicitor-General: And you understand that language?

Richard Turnbull: I am fluent in it.

Mr Solicitor-General: And when was this event to occur?

Richard Turnbull: In the following October or November; that is, in October or November of last year, 1812.

Mr Solicitor-General: Was there any other detail given?

Richard Turnbull: Not about the event itself; but mention was made of pikes and muskets that would be ready for use.

Mr Solicitor-General: From which you deduced what?

Richard Turnbull: That it was possibly a matter of some sort of insurrection or uprising. But that was a mere assumption; there was nothing spelled out. It was taking a risk, even to mention pikes and muskets in a letter.

Mr Solicitor-General: And this letter was to have been delivered to French prisoners in the north?

Richard Turnbull: No; that letter was addressed to a Mr R. D. in Ashbourne.

Mr Solicitor-General: There were no other details regarding this Mr R. D?

Richard Turnbull: None. I presumed Juggins knew the man to whom he must deliver it.

Mr Solicitor-General: You said you presumed the letter referred to an uprising of some sort. What had you in mind exactly?

Richard Turnbull: I thought it possible that there might be an uprising of those sympathetic to French ideals. To Buonaparte.

Mr Solicitor-General: And what did Juggins make of that?

Richard Turnbull: I did not challenge him. I did not wish him to know it was I who had taken his greatcoat, or that I knew anything about this letter.

Mr Solicitor-General: Did you copy the letter?

Richard Turnbull: There was not time. I merely read its contents.

Mr Solicitor-General: And what did you do next?

Richard Turnbull: I returned the letters to the greatcoat. I went to Staffordshire.

Mr Solicitor-General: You travelled with Juggins?

Richard Turnbull: No. He had given me the slip once and would probably do so again; it was better that he did not suspect. He was an easy man to follow; he made such noise everywhere that he went.

Mr Solicitor-General: What do you mean by noise?

Richard Turnbull: He preached loudly on street corners and village greens. He talked incessantly of his own self-importance in the inns. People everywhere recognized my description of him.

Mr Solicitor-General: And when you got to Staffordshire?

Richard Turnbull: He walked out to where the prisoners worked, on a remote hillside quarrying rock. He talked to certain of them; he must have given out the letters he was carrying, but he managed to do it surreptitiously.

Mr Solicitor-General: Were the prisoners not guarded?

Richard Turnbull: They were; but the place was large and the guards indolent, when they were not taunting the Frenchmen. There was in any case little chance of their escaping – it was a remote place and they were underfed and worn down with despair, most of them. Juggins was allowed to move among them; it was not unusual for the odd visitor to go to that place to ogle the captive enemy. The guards could be induced to allow that.

Mr Solicitor-General: How long did Juggins remain there?

Richard Turnbull: One day only; then he was gone.

Mr Solicitor-General: And what of his other letters?

Richard Turnbull: I was unable to ascertain to whom he delivered them.

Mr Solicitor-General: You did not follow him continuously?

Richard Turnbull: I returned to the French prisoners. I thought I might glean some information from them as to the identity of the spy, perhaps establish the connexion between them and Juggins and, if there was one, between them and the spy.

Mr Solicitor-General: And did you?

Richard Turnbull: Not exactly. It seemed that Juggins was sometimes the bringer of letters, but that there were others. It was in any case a somewhat rare occurrence.

Mr Solicitor-General: And were you not concerned by the possibility of an insurrection?

Richard Turnbull: Of course; yet I could not be sure that it was not a ploy to divert my attention from my pursuit of the spy. I therefore informed the local magistrate and wrote Lord Alexander immediately, so that he might send another to investigate, if he thought it necessary.

Mr Solicitor-General: And what further contact did you have with Ezekiel Juggins?

Richard Turnbull: None whatsoever.

Mr Solicitor-General: You did not follow him back to London?

Richard Turnbull: No. I was all but certain that he merely dabbled in the matter it was my duty to investigate. I had, however, discovered amongst the prisoners information which led to the identity of the spy.

Mr Solicitor-General: Were you aware of Juggins' movements after he had delivered the letters?

Richard Turnbull: I am aware that he went back to London. I heard of his death. But I had no contact with him.

Mr Solicitor-General: Can you explain, Mr Turnbull, the nature of the evidence you discovered amongst the French prisoners relating to the French spy?

Richard Turnbull: It concerned the seals used on the letters.

Mr Solicitor-General: The two leaves of hawthorn?

Richard Turnbull: That was the seal I had found in Litchfield-street. I had suspected then, that this was the seal of Mons. de Saint-

	Gilles. When I talked to the prisoners – I pretended to be an insurrectionist – they told me of another seal. If they received a letter with that second seal, it was the sign to prepare themselves for action.
Mr Solicitor-General:	And that seal was?
Richard Turnbull:	A rising sun, with the word ‘L’Aube’ beneath it.
Mr Solicitor-General:	‘L’Aube’ being French for ‘dawn’, is that not correct?
Richard Turnbull:	That is so.
Mr Solicitor-General:	And what was so noteworthy about that seal which they described?
Richard Turnbull:	I knew the prisoner used such a seal. It is not a common device.
Mr Solicitor-General:	So the prisoner used two seals? The one you found in Litchfield-street, and another with the rising sun and the word ‘L’Aube’?
Richard Turnbull:	Yes. They were linked in a sort of pun.
Mr Solicitor-General:	How so, a sort of pun?
Richard Turnbull:	The four letters of the word ‘aube’ – or ‘dawn’ in French, depicted by the rising sun on the second seal – form also the first four letters of the French word for hawthorn – ‘aubépine’. It is a device which not only speaks of the dawn of a new age, but links the two seals – as for example in two halves of a message, or to prove authenticity.
Mr Solicitor-General:	How came you to know this was the prisoner’s seal?
Richard Turnbull:	I had seen him use it.
Mr Solicitor-General:	So you knew at that point that Mons. de Saint-Gilles was the spy?
Richard Turnbull:	I suspected as much, though it was not proof enough to convince a Grand Jury. So I returned to London in order to obtain more evidence.

52.

The journal felt light in her hand, in contrast to the weight of information she supposed it might contain. Running a hand over its scratched and battered leather cover, she imagined Richard Turnbull sitting in his lodgings opposite the spy's headquarters in Litchfield Street, filling up the notebook's blank pages with that dense stream of Greek letters.

It had been six o'clock by the time she arrived at her flat, after battling through the early-evening rush. Without unpacking she'd switched on her laptop and printed off a Greek alphabet from the Internet. How many times had she looked at the journal and assumed it was indecipherable? Yet, sitting on the train, she'd seen in her mind's eye the letters 'γιλλες', a combination which occurred regularly throughout the text. The gamma and the lambda she knew from school physics, and it had suddenly dawned on her that she was looking at the word 'gilles'.

But had her euphoric moment of revelation on the train been over-optimistic? She reached down the journal from its place in a box-file on the top shelf above her desk and leafed through it till she found the start of the Greek section. Referring somewhat laboriously to the alphabet in front of her she began to transliterate the first paragraph of text, which read:

July 19th, 1812

E.E./E.J.

Renegade priest

'Reverend'

envoi of the devil: in his own eyes an angel of light, but in reality a fount of murky darkness

vilest creature of the metropolis

Staring at that paragraph, she realized she was on a threshold. She opened her own notebook and scribbled, hastily:

30th April

Most of Richard Turnbull's acquaintances assumed he was simply an itinerant scholar who, for whatever reason, happened to turn spycatcher in 1812 and that, after the

disastrous outcome of that decision, he returned to his life of wandering. Difficult to determine exactly what the truth is, but plainly more complex than that. The evidence can be read either way. Two distinct scenarios: wave or particle.

Wave

Suppose RT to have been a radical. The government spy Powell identified him as a republican and a deist. He himself admitted to involvement with the radical societies in the early 1790s; his writings evince not only a solidarity with the poor and the disenfranchised but a corresponding abhorrence of injustices committed in Britain in the name of Church and King. His impassioned speech at the workers' meeting in 1792 seems to express ideas he clung to for the rest of his life.

Radical activity in Britain in the late 1790s and early 1800s covered a wide spectrum which stretched between two extremes – from peaceful campaign for political reform, (e.g. the universal franchise and better working conditions) to an outright espousal of revolution based on French principles. (Some government hard-liners made no distinction between these positions, considering them all to be seditious and treasonable.)

One morning in June 1792, not long after joining the London Corresponding Society, RT chanced upon the extreme radical Silas Wylde; some agreement took place between them, although it is impossible to gauge its exact nature. Did Turnbull merely pledge himself to another radical group, one more extreme than the LCS, or did his engagement go further? Possibly he was taken on as some form of agent, working underground against the government to bring about reform or even revolution. (?)

Also possible – though little evidence for it – that he was a spy for the French. Before his visit to France in 1793, made with such high hopes, he'd been given instructions as well as papers and a passport. These might have originated with any of a number of French Republican agents working in Britain at the time.

The most obvious reading of the evidence, then – if his writings are to be taken at face value – is that RT was a radical, a supporter of the French Revolution and a friend of reform in Britain in the 1790s and into the 19th century. His account of his visit to Manchester (1812) lends support to this theory, as does the fact that he was translating Voltaire and Montaigne in 1823. His volte-face of 1812 – when he appeared to change sides – isn't necessarily the result of a change of heart: the persona of the spycatcher could have provided cover for the radical or the French spy, enabling him to escape detection. (On the other hand, he might just have believed that nobody's best interests

were served by the protraction of a bloody and expensive war and set himself to root out the French spy for that reason alone.)

Particle

But just possible, if the evidence is examined in a different light, that Turnbull wasn't a radical but a government man all along. Some or all of his writings are perhaps not to be taken at face value; could they have been intended to put off the scent, not just the contemporaries who read his writings (letters and jottings scattered about the country) but future readers too? His account of his speech at the workers' meeting, which was after all written twenty years after the event, might conceal not just errors of memory or a desire to cast himself in a favourable light, but a deliberate attempt to create a persona.

In this scenario, RT was recruited by the British government and sent to infiltrate the LCS as an informant. This not unusual – the radical societies were riddled with government spies (many of whose reports still exist). The fact that Powell described RT as a republican and a Jacobin means only that his act was a good one. (The case of Lynam – another spy – is relevant here: June 1793, L. accused by members of the LCS of being a government infiltrator and subjected to a formal enquiry; but his defence was so convincing that he was acquitted and allowed to continue membership. As Turnbull himself pointed out, often hard to tell who is a spy.)

Also possible that Turnbull travelled to Paris in 1793 as an agent of the British government. His apparent change of heart in 1812 would then merely have been an acknowledgement of the position he'd held all along.

But why use his journal of 1812 to recount episodes which had taken place much earlier in his life? Were these just random snippets of autobiography, or was there a connection, perceived or real, between his hunt for the spy in 1812 and the events of 1787 and 1793/1794? Or was Turnbull deliberately rewriting the past in order to project his fictional persona? Is it possible that he lived under what in a later age came to be called 'deep cover', that the persona he had constructed was so elaborate that it became a part of himself?

(Though not impossible, this scenario is nonetheless somewhat far-fetched. For a man to pretend to be someone he isn't, in front of his fellow-men, is one thing. But to carry on that pretence in his private journals and letters – and in his choice of friends – is another.)

Wave and particle

Yet might the truth not lie more accurately in the accommodation of these contradictory positions than in the choice of one or another? The matter is complicated by the incompleteness of the available evidence; but it is nonetheless true that, depending on which evidence is looked at, or how it is looked at, RT appears as radical or government man, loyal subject or traitor.

(I keep coming back to the idea that – as I started to explain to MF yesterday evening – RT might, like light, be more precisely described as both. But Fournier right to question that – a scenario which perhaps makes little sense in the real world. One would expect RT, like Schrödinger's cat, to have been, at least in some sense, one thing or another.)

How could he have been both?

Lord Alexander's letter hints that RT worked for both government and radicals; it would seem, then, that he was some sort of double agent. But which side was he really on?

Interestingly, Turnbull himself points out the ambiguity surrounding the term 'traitor', a word which, then as now, usually evoked a torrent of righteous anger. Not only did he highlight its dependence on geographical location (so a traitor in England became overnight a loyal subject in France) but expanded its definition to include, not just acts against the king or the state, but those repressive measures committed against the people in order to preserve an unjust status quo. In both these senses, then, RT could be both traitor and loyal subject.

But he also wrote of 'living as one thing and another' and admitted a need to play a part. Might he have been drawn to the life of a double agent, not because (or not only because) he believed in the rightness of his cause, whatever that was, but because the double life itself was indispensable to him?

Will the passages of the Greek journal elucidate the matter?

She opened up the journal and read on, slowly, writing down her transliteration as she went.

July 19th, 1812

E.E./E.J.

Renegade priest – ‘Reverend’

envoi of the devil: in his own eyes an angel of light, but in reality a fount of murky darkness

vilest creature of the metropolis

There was a knock at the door. Julia noticed that she hadn’t taken her coat off and that the room had gone dark around the tiny pool of light from her desk lamp. She looked through the peephole. Miles. Guiltily, she realized that, not only had she not seen him for ages, but that she’d been too immersed in her work even to notice the fact.

‘Hey.’ He kissed her. ‘What are you doing sitting all on your own in the dark on a Saturday night?’

‘I got carried away with a piece of work. I’ve had a breakthrough. To be quite honest, I’d forgotten it was Saturday. Not that it makes any difference to me, really.’

‘Want to come out for a drink?’

‘I’m really tired. I’ve just got back from Paris.’

‘But I’ve hardly seen you lately. Not at all, in fact. For weeks.’

‘All right. A couple of quickies.’ She switched off the lamp and picked up her bag.

‘What were you doing in Paris? Or shouldn’t I ask?’

‘Research trip. You remember the diary I saw at Ruffec last summer? Written by Manon de Saint-Gilles?’

‘No; what about it?’

‘She wrote a later one. That’s what I went to see. It was very interesting.’

It was gone eleven when she got back. She didn’t ask Miles to stay; she made a hot chocolate and sat at her desk once more.

Little evidence of his whereabouts; gone to ground, a rat down a hole.

Saw him only once but shall never forget his appearance. Little changed, except a slight ageing. The same moon-face (an appearance of innocence and meekness); the

big slow body; his hair turned white and loose upon his head, like that of a kindly uncle.

A lightning-flash of recognition as soon as he stepped up to the house in Litchfield-street. The turmoil of my mind unimaginable. A stroke of luck, perhaps. But he took off again from London and I am constrained to follow. My intention: to finish this business once and for all.

The same man, for all his change of name. The same false, fiendish, intractable, high-handed priest.

A small mission in Bear Yard, off Vere-street. Another, larger one, near the vinegar manufactory on Old-street. Known to travel often, but his business on these journeys uncertain. A suspicion that his enthusiasm conceals a different evil. (But nothing more evil than his brand of enthusiasm.)

He asserts that the Millennium will occur in thirteen years' time. What need then to be involved in spying for the French?

He visits many of the dissenting chapels in the north, particularly in Yorkshire which, he claims, is his place of origin. This information gleaned from an old woman in Barnsley, a member of the Primitive Methodist chapel there, who trembled even as she spoke of him. He is not well liked, particularly by the women; but he ingratiates himself into sects and conventicles and has himself taken in, given food and lodging in the name of God.

Julia remembered a letter she'd read about a year ago, written by Richard Turnbull to William Montagu during a trip to Yorkshire or Lancashire; it was in the private collection of an elderly gentleman who was writing a history of religious dissent in England. In the letter, Turnbull had described in great detail a service in a dissenting chapel in a small village. Julia searched through her files until she found the transcription she had made of it.

August 22nd, 1812 — Tuesday evening. — I write in haste, dear Montagu; for I must send this letter by someone I trust and not by the post. (Fear not – the boy who has

appeared on your doorstep, though he resembles the most evil ragamuffin on the earth, is entirely to be trusted. You may safely send your reply with him.)

You cannot imagine, dear friend, the dark places I am forced to inhabit, the incomprehensibly tortuous paths I tread. I have spent the last two weeks in one religious house or another: church, chapel, meeting house, tabernacle and conventicle. But, though exhausted, I have made no progress whatsoever. You would not imagine, Will, the utter medley of sects we have in this land. Trinitarians and Athanasians, Arians and Socinians, Calvinists, Sandemanians, Hutchinsonians, Baxterians, Swedenborgians, Quakers and Jumpers, Destructionists and Universalists. And of Methodists no end: Arminian and Calvinist, New and Primitive – shall I go on?

A description of a meeting I attended two days ago will perhaps give you a taste of my predicament. A cold, dark chapel built of grey stone, perhaps three dozen worshippers who had traipsed under a steady rain after dinner to get there. A damp gloom. A hymn was sung – I give you here one verse, typical of its lugubrious whole (which went on for twelve verses at the pace of a dirge):

> O wondrous Wound! O sacrifice!
> For me you paid the price.
> I long to drink thy precious Blood,
> Your body now my Food.

After this the congregation sat with bowed heads and the minister called upon the Almighty to send His words of wisdom. There was silence for a space of about five minutes, in which I almost fell asleep. (I had walked from Halifax the day before and slept upon damp hay in a farmer's barn.) But I was awakened by a shriek which came from the back of the chapel and continued, it seemed, far longer than human breath could last. When it stopped, there was a thud; on turning round to look, I saw the utterer of the shriek, a young woman, lying motionless upon the stone flags. No one ran to help her; on the contrary, a cry of 'Praise the Lord Almighty!' went up, and immediately they all began to clap and cheer and shout in a gibberish which was no language I have ever heard (and I know many). At the same time they trembled and waved their arms about, and others fell down as if dead upon the floor. Those not moved at the first instance soon became so; it was as if a wave spread through them, or like the influenza in winter; and soon the chapel was a mass of shouting and trembling and singing. This lasted for perhaps three quarters of an hour; then, just as suddenly as they had begun, all fell silent. The dead got up and sat down again and,

after a quiet prayer from the minister, they left the place with a beatific look, as if they had experienced some great release.

You are no doubt laughing at my misfortune; for you know my aversion to religion of any kind – my aversion to conjecture which passes itself off as certainty, to anything not based on demonstrable fact. (We have disagreed enough times on the matter, you and I.) Even Voltaire, a philosopher I admire in every other respect, disappoints me with his Deism. (And I find these episodes perplexing on another score. These folk are constantly warned by their ministers against the dangers of drink and loose living, against rowdy and unseemly behaviour; yet their chapel meetings are more raucous and disorderly than the London Tavern at ten of an evening.)

I recently came across a pamphlet written by a young man late of the university of Oxford – the said pamphlet having resulted, it seems, in his being sent down from that august institution. All available copies of it were seized and burnt. (Burn this letter, William, as soon as you have read it; for I am about to make a proposition most shocking: that the burning of a book of any sort is a foul deed, indicative of a narrow-minded bigotry; yet, far from achieving its aim of suppressing the ideas contained therein, serves only to encourage them.) Will there ever be a time when the learned professors of our universities are not thorough-going traditionists? When a man can avow his atheism without being treated like a felon? When a young scholar might be congratulated for having spent his time at his writing desk instead of carousing with his friends? In fact the said work (passed to me by a friend who had rescued a copy in Oxford) was little more than an innocuous examination of evidence for the existence of a deity. If such evidence is scanty, is the writer to blame because he reports the fact?)

My mind runs on many things tonight, Will. I dread the end of this letter, because then the clappings and tremblings will fill it again, and perhaps also memories even darker. Do you remember my namesake Richard Brothers, the Prophet of Paddington? Imprisoned as a madman almost twenty years ago. One day in 1795 he claimed that, when he threw down his stick in the Strand at noon, it would turn into a serpent, like the staff of Moses in the desert. I was amongst the crowd which had gathered that day, with two friends from the Corresponding Society, and I have to report, William, that my conduct and theirs was more becoming a trio of schoolboys than three ardent republicans. In fact, I must take most of the blame; for I started up a heckling in which they merely followed. (Needless to say, the stick remained obdurately a stick, after the nature of things.)

But are they not all madmen, Will – the priests who claim the body will rise again; who, because of that, say it matters little that many live in poverty and that it is a sin to object to things as they are because God alone will reward and punish?

The monster I seek has gone to ground and is nowhere to be seen. He had lately established himself in the West Riding of Yorkshire (as well, it seems, as in London) where Methodists and other hell-fire preachers are roundly welcomed – but by the time I arrived, he had been forced to leave his Manse in Bradford, having been the subject of certain allegations regarding his servant-girls. It seems the dissemination of the true word, for this ranter at least, is always accompanied with calumny and persecution.

But now I too have ranted over both sides of this paper. I have a request of you Montagu; that is why I write this letter. Take the enclosed and hide it in your deepest, darkest cellar, or the most shadowy corner of your attic. It is not to see the light of day until I come to claim it. It will do you no harm. (The lad who delivers it has been faithful to me; if you could spare him a guinea, it would be well spent, both as a just reward and to ensure his silence.)

Spare a thought for me, William, your friend

Richard Turnbull.

53.

Peter Marchmont was eating his tea one Wednesday evening in early May, sitting quietly at his neatly-laid dining table, when he heard a ferocious knocking at the door. It couldn't be Drue Paulin again, surely? He never called without an appointment. Peter looked carefully out of his dining-room window onto the street below. Nothing. The red Audi that Paulin had pointed out during his last visit was parked outside again. He'd hardly seen it during the past month. The knocking stopped, then set up again. He ran down the stairs; the peephole showed a clean-shaven face, short hair. Vaguely familiar. He opened the door on the chain and peered through the gap.

The man smiled and held up a warrant card. 'Detective Sergeant Carter.' Peter squinted at the card. It was as he said. Detective Sergeant Carter. His heart lurched. He remembered where he'd seen the face: this was someone who occasionally

frequented the Blue Teapot. Always alone; slightly supercilious. But a detective. It couldn't be a coincidence. How much did he know? Was the red Audi his, then?

'We've had reports of some break-ins further up the street. Have you seen anyone acting suspicious?'

Peter forced himself to breathe. He smiled. 'Not in the way you mean. No one with "burglar" tattooed across his forehead. And I keep my eyes open – I suppose I'm a little vulnerable because of the business.'

'Got decent security, have you?'

'Oh, very good. Two alarms – a separate one for the café.'

'Mind if I come in and take a look? They're clever, this lot, managed to bypass a couple of quite sophisticated systems.'

The last thing Peter wanted was to have this stranger, this enemy, inside his personal space. But to refuse would look suspicious. Better to pretend he had nothing to hide.

'The café alarm is controlled from here,' he said, jabbing an arm towards the wall. 'And this is the one for the flat.'

'The flat's how many floors?'

'Just the one, above the café. Come and have a look if you like.' He led the way up the stairs. Let him come. Let him see there was nothing to see.

'There's a door at the top of the stairs, here – I keep it locked at night. And when I'm working in the café.'

'And the windows are all double-glazed?' The detective poked his head into the dining room.

'All of them.' He waved towards the kitchen. He showed the sergeant the bedroom and the bathroom. 'Which numbers did you say the break-ins had been at?'

'I can't remember offhand. Down towards the tube station. Is there anything above this?'

'A little attic, as far as I can remember. I never go up there. Some of my neighbours have converted theirs, but it costs a fortune, and I've all the space I need here. I've seen you in the Blue Teapot, haven't I? I've a good memory for faces.'

'Yep. I stop off sometimes on my way home. By the way,' he said as he was on his way through the front door; you don't happen to know someone by the name of Drue Paulin, do you?'

But Peter was ready for that one. It was the way they always did it in the crime dramas he watched occasionally on TV. An afterthought on the threshold. I'm not stupid, you know. I may not be like you, but you'll have to work a damned sight harder before you pull a fast one on me like that.

'Drue the antiques dealer? He consumes vast quantities of my cake and tries to sell me artefacts I don't want. If you ask me, he's lonely; his mother's got Alzheimer's and some of the people he does business with look down on him because he's black and his father was a docker. Haven't seen him for a while, though. He's not got himself into trouble, has he?'

When Peter closed the front door behind Detective Sergeant Carter, he felt sick and his heart was pounding. Alarmingly arrhythmic. He drew the bolts, climbed the stairs and locked the inner door, poured himself a large brandy and gulped down half of it. It couldn't have been a coincidence that a detective sergeant, who for some reason had been watching him on and off, should want to look around his flat. He didn't believe in that sort of coincidence.

He took another swig of brandy. What was Carter's interest in him? He couldn't know about the notebook, because there was nothing to know. Yet. It was sitting on the desk in his study, waiting for his next meeting with Julia Dalton; but until he gave it to her, he was as innocent as the detective himself. In any case, he'd defy the Met's finest to discern its true provenance.

More worrying was the sergeant's mention of Drue Paulin. Had he seen Drue at the flat? But even if he had, he could know nothing. Drue was careful. He could always deny knowledge of Drue's criminal activity. He'd fielded the detective's question well, he thought. There was no need to get het up about the visit. Probably just something and nothing.

But somethings like that weren't usually nothings. More often than not they weren't good. Things added up. In this case there were punter and policeman, policeman and Drue. Not a good combination. His heart was still palpitating. Were they on to him? All his life he'd feared that one day his secrets would come out; all his dark misdeeds put on show under a glaring light. What were they, those misdeeds? He wasn't sure; they were unspoken, unspeakable.

Was he being paranoid? He wished he'd asked Detective Sergeant Carter about his car. What sort of car do you have, Detective? Not a red Audi? I'd be careful; red

cars have a tendency to get vandalised on this street. But he hadn't thought of it. And if he had, he probably wouldn't have had the guts to say it.

He cleared away the remains of his half-eaten meal, scraping a now-cold sausage casserole and a blueberry muffin into the bin. It was spoilt, and he was no longer hungry. He tried to think back to the times Carter had eaten in the Blue Teapot. Had he said anything? Asked questions, maybe? Peter couldn't remember. He made a pot of tea, his hands shaking slightly. While it brewed, he took out a pen and paper from the bureau in his bedroom and scribbled a short note.

A bad case of food-poisoning necessitates a lengthy quarantine.

He had no meetings scheduled with Drue Paulin, but it was best to be on the safe side. He'd understand the note; after all, it was Drue who'd alerted him to the car down the road. He could have sent an email with the same message but it wasn't safe; the police could hack into email. He sealed the note in an envelope, addressed it and stuck on a stamp. He'd get Mrs Fanshawe to post it in the morning; he wouldn't put it past that detective to be sitting round the corner, waiting to see if he left the building.

He'd start leaving the lights on in the sitting room when he went up to his study in the evenings, just in case; wouldn't put it past the sergeant to carry on watching the building. He poured a cup of tea and another brandy. Then he picked up his phone, dialled a number.

'Jack, Peter from the Blue Teapot. Have you had the police round lately? No? About some break-ins up the street. No, I hadn't either. I've just had some detective round. Thanks, Jack. Take care now.'

His next call was to the local police. After selecting several options from the automated menu he at last got to speak to an officer. When he asked if he might speak to Detective Sergeant Carter, he was told there was no officer of that name at any of the Lambeth Borough police stations. Did he mean Detective Inspector Carter at Streatham? Peter said no, he must be mistaken, and put the phone down.

So no burglaries and a police officer who must have come from outside the area. What did that mean? It meant that this was no random visit. Carter was after him. Peter washed the contents of the teapot down the sink and went to lie on his bed.

54.

The trial of Henri Jacques de Saint-Gilles, for High Treason

30th January 1813

XIII.

Mr Solicitor-General: I will move on, Mr Turnbull, to the investigations you carried out after you had returned from Staffordshire.

Richard Turnbull: I next turned my attention to one of the other visitors to the house; one who came more regularly than the rest.

Mr Solicitor-General: How regularly?

Richard Turnbull: At least once a week. Occasionally he stayed for a day or two. I therefore concluded that he was a person of some importance in the enterprise and that he most likely enjoyed the spy's confidence.

Mr Solicitor-General: And this man's name was?

Richard Turnbull: John Price.

Mr Solicitor-General: What did you discover regarding this John Price?

Richard Turnbull: He was a man who covered his tracks. He seemed to go to ground the moment I started to observe him. He gave me the slip on more than one occasion; less, I think because he was aware of my presence, than that he behaved habitually so as to prevent detection. I engaged Martin, who was more adept than I at following by stealth; he could make himself almost invisible on the street – and who takes notice of a street urchin except to guard his watch and his pocket book? Price made his way to a house in Turner's Court; Martin enquired of a neighbour and was told Price lived there with a young woman.

Mr Solicitor-General: This was Price's wife?

Richard Turnbull: She passed as his wife, but there was some doubt as to the regularity of their union. I paid a visit to the house early the next morning; but Price had already left and I was sent up by the servant to a small dark parlour. There sat the young woman with a child upon her knee.

Mr Solicitor-General: And what light did she shed on Price's whereabouts and the nature of his business?

Richard Turnbull: Very little. She said he came and went as he pleased, but confided little in her; that sometimes she did not see him for weeks at a time. He had many commercial interests, though she did not know what they were; he was compelled to sweat for an income which was ever uncertain – the war made all uncertain. I asked if she knew where I might find her husband; she suggested I might try his shop in Chandos-street. However, though I was inclined rather to believe her than not, I waited a little in the street before I proceeded to the shop. After an interval of ten minutes or so, the maidservant left the house with a letter in her hand, which she took, not to the shop, but in the opposite direction, to a coffee house in Covent Garden.

Mr Solicitor-General: Which coffee house?

Richard Turnbull: The Queen's Head.

Mr Solicitor-General: In short, Mr Turnbull, what did you ascertain concerning Mr Price?

Richard Turnbull: He moved unobtrusively and with little trace, not as most men of business who love to vaunt their triumphs and their wealth to all and sundry. Price was a citizen of the American Republic. He dealt in prints and maps from the shop already mentioned, which he left in the charge of one George Hargreaves, and apparently spent his day about town, although I was unable at first to detect exactly who his associates were or in what his business consisted. There were rumours of speculation – of ships and cargoes – an increasing number of which had been lost since the onset of the war.

Mr Solicitor-General: What sort of cargoes?

Richard Turnbull: In the early days of the Revolutionary government, Price had used his immunity in France to run ships out of that country – exporting confiscated goods and selling them in England and America at many times the price he had paid. He had the ability, it seemed, to befriend governments, to sail close to the wind but always on the right side of it. Even at the height

of the Terror, while his countryman Paine was imprisoned and in fear of his life, Price had gone about his business in Paris with seeming immunity.

Mr Solicitor-General: And what of his fortune?

Richard Turnbull: It was rumoured that, despite his many losses – natural for one trading in such a way at such a dangerous time – he had nonetheless over the years amassed a large fortune – of which the woman who passed as his wife was seemingly unaware. If she was playing a part, it was a very hard one; for she and her child lived in near-poverty. She seemed not to know that Price had another house, in Somers Town, in which he lived the single life of a bachelor, visiting her only when the whim took him.

Mr Solicitor-General: And how did you proceed in this matter?

Richard Turnbull: I insinuated myself into Price's coterie. Since he was a man of few allegiances except to his profits, he could be useful to me. I formed an idea – if I could be sure that Price and the French spy had an association – to prevail upon the former to turn King's Evidence. In thus producing a second witness, this would satisfy the requirements of the Grand Jury.

Mr Solicitor-General: And you succeeded in this?

Richard Turnbull: With more ease than I had imagined. Price was already wearying of his association with the spy.

Mr Solicitor-General: Do you know on what account?

Richard Turnbull: He was dissatisfied with the sum he was being paid for providing intelligence; for out of that sum, he must needs pay the intelligencers he employed on his own account. I gathered that there had been some tension between the spy and Price on this matter. It was a bone of contention between them.

Mr Solicitor-General: How did you proceed?

Richard Turnbull: I feigned a disaffection with my rôle as an agent of government, and let it be known, that I was willing to sell to the United States (the war having lately broken out with that country) some interesting information in my possession.

Mr Solicitor-General: And what ensued*?*

Richard Turnbull: Price was taken in. He bought the information from me with the intention of passing it to his government.

Mr Solicitor-General: And what of the information you sold to him? Was this not a very dangerous course of action?

Richard Turnbull: I gave him information that was of no import whatsoever. It was such as any man making an excursion to Chatham and Portsmouth might glean, admixed with a judicious amount of make-believe.

Mr Solicitor-General: And Price paid you for this information?

Richard Turnbull: Yes.

Mr Solicitor-General: On how many occasions?

Richard Turnbull: Two or three. But I did not keep the money.

Mr Solicitor-General: And this transaction served what purpose?

Richard Turnbull: It was a means by which I could entrap him. I obtained written communications from him: papers, memoranda, instructions written in his hand and signed by him. I then revealed myself in my true guise as a government agent with enough evidence to hang him. But I offered him an alternative: if he turned King's Evidence and revealed to me – and in court – the identity of the French spy; if he enabled me to obtain documents in the spy's hand which would likewise serve to convict him, he would walk free.

Mr Solicitor-General: And he agreed readily to this?

Richard Turnbull: He was undeniably frightened. A promised sum of money added to the logic of the matter.

Mr Solicitor-General: And did he reveal the identity of the spy for whom he had been working?

Richard Turnbull: He did.

Mr Solicitor-General: What was the name of this spy?

Richard Turnbull: Mons. de Lessac.

Mr Solicitor-General: In full?

Richard Turnbull: Mons. Henri de Lessac.

Mr Solicitor-General: You were familiar with that name?

Richard Turnbull: No, I was not; but I suspected that it was an alias.

Mr Solicitor-General: Why so?

Richard Turnbull: Because of the suspicion I had already begun to entertain that the spy was Mons. de Saint-Gilles.

55.

Julia rested her head on her hands and closed her eyes. It was never easy, dumping a boyfriend. They took it hard, couldn't see it coming. And Miles had taken it harder than most. Did he have no idea who she was?

It had come out of the blue. 'Julia, marry me,' he'd said over dinner, as if he was asking her to do no more than walk up Telegraph Hill with him. Then, when she'd hesitated, he'd added, 'Or live with me for a while, see how it works out.' For once she'd been lost for words, simultaneously aware of the idea's absurdity and the pain her rejection was bound to cause him.

'It's not just you I don't want to marry, Miles,' she'd said at last, watching the blood which oozed from his steak pooling on the white plate. The June night was hot and stifling, the faintest hint of coolness just starting, at nine o'clock, to waft in through the open frontage of the Soho restaurant. 'You know my views on marriage. I don't want that sort of relationship, full stop.'

He took her hand. 'I can understand you being afraid. I know how much you value your freedom.'

There was truth in that, possibly. Afraid of being engulfed, of losing her self. Even, perhaps, of losing the other. Wouldn't any two-into-one relationship end in catastrophe, like that first disaster, at the very beginning of her life, which had perhaps set the course for what would follow?

'Miles, it just wouldn't work, believe me. I don't want to marry you.' She withdrew her hand. 'We'd make each other dreadfully unhappy. I'd be a wave whenever you were a particle. And vice versa.'

'But why would we? Are we unhappy now?'

'No, but that's because we each do our own thing and hardly see each other some weeks. And that's actually my ideal. I don't want to live in somebody's pocket. I don't want children. I don't want a conventional relationship.'

'You're living in a bubble. But you'll be sorry; you'll wake up one morning a sad and lonely old woman and find you've lost the best years of your life to scholarship.'

'That's a risk I'm prepared to take. But it's not that simple.'

'It is that simple. Either you love me or you don't.

'Well, in that case, I don't. Full stop, end of story.' She'd felt bad about that as soon as she'd said it; it was more complex than a simple either-or. That wasn't the

way she lived. But sometimes life did, in practical terms, offer only discrete categories. You married a man or you didn't, lived with him or not. Either-or not both-and.

'You know he's mixed up with a criminal, don't you?'

'Who?'

'Marchmont, of course. Who else?'

'Not that again. We've been through it all before and there's nothing more to say. I don't care who he's mixed up with; all we do is exchange documents.'

'And what if those documents are stolen?'

'Do you know that?'

'As good as.'

'Which means that's what you want to think but you've got no evidence. Miles, just leave it. That's not the issue here and you know it.'

'What is the issue, then?'

She pushed away her half-eaten risotto. The prawns were overcooked, the rice dry. 'The real issue between us,' she said, making an effort to be gentle, 'is that I'm not the woman you think I am.'

'And what do you mean by that?'

'You've fallen in love with an illusion; you've joined up the dots and got the wrong picture. The way you see it, the real Julia, the woman you want to spend your life with, has been taken over by an obsession which is ruining her life and from which she needs to be rescued.'

'Go on.' He was staring at her, his arms folded.

'But it's not something I'll grow out of, not some add-on that I could do without if only I could be weaned off it. It's my life. I may have to take a job I don't like – in the current climate I'll be lucky not to end up on the checkouts in Sainsbury's – but my heart will always be in my research. It's who I am.'

'So how have we ended up like this?'

'I don't know. At the beginning, I liked you and you liked me, and that's all there was to it. I didn't think I'd led you on and I'm sorry if I have. I never wanted anything other than a casual relationship.'

They'd parted on the street, with harsh words and exasperation. Miles had wanted to take her home, but she'd refused. She'd wished Foyle's was still open; half an hour of quiet browsing might have calmed her. She walked to Westminster – there

was solace in the steady rhythm of her feet – and caught the 453 bus. A floating memory of the sun-speckled orchard of the Château Ruffec crossed her mind, followed by an image of Miles's hunched shoulders as he'd walked off, angry and despondent.

Miles lived in a world of black and white. You were good or bad, a criminal or an upright citizen, in love or not in love. There was little in-between ground. For that reason alone they would never see eye to eye. Julia lived in a complex world in which hard facts rubbed shoulders with shadows and ambiguities. Looking out of the window she saw the reflection of the inside of the bus, her head in one corner, superimposed on the cheerless streets of the Elephant and Castle. Her face disintegrated, like a cubist painting, so that she wasn't quite herself.

When she got home, although it was nearly midnight, she tidied up the flat and changed her bedding, smoothing over the blue-and-white chequered quilt cover till it was wrinkle-free. It had been prophetic, perhaps, that small bed, the tiny, cell-like bedroom. Last of all, she cleared her desk, polished the surface, put away files and notebooks and straightened her pile of post-it notes. Wedged behind her pen-pot she found the cork which Mathias Fournier had tossed across his dining table to her weeks ago; she threw it deftly across the room, landing it in the bin-bag by the front door. An almost impossible throw. That evening, as Miles had reminded her, she had tossed away the possibility of a nice house, a comfortable life, a police pension. Was there someone else, he'd asked? Someone with more money? As if. She took the bin-bag down to the wheelie-bin. Katrina had gone to her mother's for the weekend to get some rest; the other students must be out. Mr Carmichael was partially deaf and sat up for much of the night in any case. His short marriage to Emily, thought Julia, as she quietly closed the front door, had been the happiest time of his life. She took the stairs two at a time, all three flights of them, gritting her teeth against the exhaustion in her legs. Then she showered and finally sat at her desk beneath the eyeless busts of Newton and Wittgenstein. But she was too tired to concentrate.

Miles was mistaken and she'd been right to reject him; but she pitied him, saddened by the dejection which had crossed his face. And for her too the rift between them was loss as well as liberation. Loss of companionship and the friendly warmth of another body, a shoulder for one's head. And of a hope, perhaps – of something beyond herself, something only dimly perceived.

The next day was Saturday. She took a trip into central London and bought a dictionary of ancient Greek. Richard Turnbull seemed to have used the odd Greek word or phrase now and again, often when a straight transliteration between the two alphabets was not possible. Flicking through the dictionary over a cappuccino, she wished she could learn the language properly. So much she could learn, if she only had the time.

She was back at her desk before lunch-time and spent the rest of the day working on the journal.

September 29th, 1812.

That J.N. should end up in London. – I little expected it, though in fact I should not have been surprised; the city is a magnet which attracts all sorts of deceit and greed, a hot-bed for money-grubs. And he ever had an eye to gain, the knack of profiting from the misfortune of others. Even then. The centre of his world is commerce, which England has made her speciality, at the cost of her soul. And he has, it seems, found a myriad ways of making money; slipping through scheme after scheme, much like water, without himself taking shape. A man of few allegiances, except to the building up of profit and wealth.

Three young men full of elation: not only to witness, but to take part in, the outworking of the greatest of all revolutions.

The life which thrilled us then no ordinary life.

But of those three young men who once ran eagerly through the streets of Paris, I am, it would appear, alone in remaining true to our early ideals – ideals which, I need not say, I no longer hope to see realised in my lifetime. It seems to me as if the fabric of the world is falling apart. Perceval shot dead in the House itself.[14] (There were those who thought this to be the sign of an uprising, but if it was, it came to nought.) This dreadful war which sucks the country dry – a wild ghoul at the breast of the nation. And yet (always I write 'and yet' – as if I can never be sure of a statement but that I have to qualify it) not even I would wish to see Buonaparte's hordes running through London. We once hoped that the French army would liberate England from the

[14] The Prime Minister, Spencer Perceval, was shot dead in the lobby of the House of Commons on 11 May 1812 by a disaffected businessman, John Bellingham.

corruptions of monarchy and priesthood, bringing justice and equality. Vain hope! for Buonaparte is no less a king, though his crown be of a different shape.

New names. New lives. – All three of us have lived under different names at one time or another. And J.N. has now become an other entirely. Newman is become a new man. He is John Price now – an apt enough name, I suppose, given that he has made a fortune out of buying and selling.

He pretended not to know me in the street; but must know nonetheless that I recognised him. And mine is the upper hand; for he is unaware of my present *rôle*. He no doubt attributed our encounter to chance, seeing in it a minor misfortune which he could shrug off. But I had, upon seeing him saunter down Litchfield-street and up Grafton-street, dashed the other way, up West-street, to meet him at the end of Moor-street. That he thrives in his new circumstances is undoubted – as I could judge by his fine white breeches and foamy cravat, the health on his plump cheeks. But minor misfortune turns so easily to disaster; and it may be that in his destiny the part of malign star will be assigned to me. He knows not that I have observed him on several occasions entering the house in Litchfield-street.

We had in those months such an experience as no man could hope ever to have again. A unity of mind and of spirit – and such a purpose! had we succeeded, we would none of us be what we are today. Yet even then we were not wholly united; each looked for personal gain of one sort or another. How our lives are formed! Knitted through with threads of chance, concatenations of events which link them with those of others; a wild phantastic stuff of many filaments. My mother – Juggins – Elizabeth – Rosine – Manon – Saint-Gilles – Sophie. And Newman.

A venture which came to nothing. The world moves on, change is slow and infinitesimal. We should have seen that what the Revolution had failed to do would not be achieved by our disparate little group. (It does not augur well, I am sure, that we are all now thrown together in London, in this year 1812, as we were all three in Paris in 1793. Chance it may be; but I doubt good can come of it.)

Never to speak or write of that time. We agreed when we parted in May of 1794 to draw a blanket of silence over it. Some experiences, perhaps, run so deep that they do not bear recounting. Is this a quality inherent in the experience, or is it a property of mind, which shies away from uncovering hopes and joys which exist no more? It is surely also something else: that, in the telling, an event is not merely recounted but recreated; pulled out of its time and place, it comes to have an existence of its own within the patterns of the words inked upon the page. It happened thus, I say. – Three

young men in Paris. Their scheme, like all such schemes (as men find out once they have left their first youth) came to nothing and they went their separate ways, only to be thrown together again nearly twenty years later. That much I can write; for it says nothing of our false hope and wretched pain. And yet, were I to write the events of those months in detail, I would fail to evoke their particular flavour. – Like trying to recreate the perfume of a woman long since turned to dust, the look in her eyes, the feel of her skin. Even were I free to tell all, I should still not capture the essence of those events. The act of writing is merely a lens upon that time, which, while we want it to represent with accuracy, yet distorts; a phantasmagoria of people and places which once existed but which now are mere tricks of a lantern, spectres made with lights upon a wall.

But if any of this were to come to light – and that, with the three of us now ranged against each other, is a possibility – I would tell a different tale. Lies – or fractions of the truth arranged so as to veil the whole.

Why does my own life-history fascinate me? Why have I been engaged these ten or so years upon it? And why have I still nothing but bits, like the crumbs of bread left upon the table once the diners have retired? Often have I started to write the story of my life from its beginning, and got nowhere; both words and memory have failed me. It is only when I set out to write a tiny part of it, that it is possible to produce anything at all. It is perhaps that I am unused to writing in any other way – I borrow paper, I write in my friends' books, abandon my work in their libraries, start again at twenty or fifty miles' distance. It occurs to me that perhaps my pen, like myself, is most suited to wanderings and is averse to being fixed upon a single task. But I feel also as if my life were a mere jumble, without overall coherence; as if some deity, tired from his day's work and eager for a tankard of ale, threw together in slap-dash haste the scraps from his workshop – and made me; and that I must for ever reproduce that incongruity.

Two *hiatuses* in my Memoirs. Two events which admit not of being recounted.

J.N. has a woman – whom he keeps in degraded circumstances, in a mean little lodging in Turner's Court. He has fathered a child upon her, yet refuses to regularize their union; pays her a small income which is hardly enough to feed the pair of them. The parlour in which we spoke was dark and damp; she sat sadly with the child – a boy of about a year and a half – upon her knee. 'He is all I have in the world,' she said, stroking his fair hair, 'apart from John, whom I see but infrequently now – he has much work to do – and the child and I to keep, and business so bad with the war.'

Such loyalty misplaced angered me, and I burned to impart the truth to this poor dupe of a woman – it irks me to see people live in illusion – yet she will find out soon enough, no doubt; for now, perhaps, the thought of her John and his toil for the pair of them is necessary to her in those miserable circumstances. It is quite possible, of course, that she would not have believed me; one may be duped as much by oneself as by another. She has too much to lose not to cling to dear John's falsehoods. She had an air of sad resignation about her, as if fate and her paramour were little different. Yet she appeared to be a woman of some learning; I noticed books piled on a side-table, along with pen and ink. It cannot be easy for her to live as she does.

She very quickly after I left composed a note which she sent by her maid to N. – which shows also her inexperience, from which I concluded that she is most likely not involved in his darker dealings. An unnecessary risk, given that she had already directed me to his shop in Chandos-street, where she knew he was not to be found. I followed the maid to the Queen's Head in Covent Garden; she did not enter, but paid a boy to deliver the letter within the tavern, where her master was most fittingly holed up amongst pugilists, thieves and whores. I had hardly crossed the threshold but I was set upon by two stinking hags of uncertain age, who leered at me, their dirty paws on my arm. A man must be desperate indeed if he has to stoop so low to obtain the pleasures of the flesh. I brushed them off and found my one-time friend sitting in a booth at the back of the shop with a news-sheet before him. 'My dear fellow, you did not recognise me in Litchfield-street the day before yesterday,' I said, sitting down opposite him and delighting in the look of consternation which flickered momentarily across his face. I said I found myself in straitened circumstances and was seeking employment, that I had an intimate knowledge of the city and was prepared to turn my hand to anything. He offered me money, there and then; he said it was for old friendship's sake, but I had no doubt that it was to get rid of me. As if he had no idea of who I am, that I am not susceptible to riches and cannot be bought off. When I demurred, he said he might be able to procure something for me, that I should call upon him at home two days hence, at eleven of the clock, when he would introduce me to some gentlemen of his acquaintance. Though he could promise nothing – Times are hard, my friend, trust me, he said as I left. I would as soon trust the old harlots with their wigs and patches as a man who wears brass buttons and a gold ring while his mistress and child live in poverty; but an introduction into his circle was what I wanted, and I left satisfied.

56.

Miles lit a Marlboro Light from the packet in his glove compartment. He'd given up smoking years ago, but started again after his bust-up with Julia. Just the odd one, now and again, when he couldn't think. He'd gone back to watching the Blue Teapot, too. The café had shut an hour ago; the lights had gone on in Marchmont's flat upstairs. Apart from that, nothing.

Marchmont's place had been nothing out of the ordinary. Tidy and very clean, spotless even. Solid, old-fashioned furniture, well looked after; either good-quality antique or top-of-the-range repro; hard to tell the difference sometimes. A couple of pictures, historical prints. But no antique knick-knacks that he might have bought off Drue Paulin in a weak moment. Nothing suspicious at all, in fact.

What had he expected? Incontrovertible evidence that Marchmont was a crook? Of course, he'd only been allowed a glance at the flat. And Marchmont could have been lying about the attic; but that was clutching at straws, he knew. He was skating on thin ice in any case, gaining entry to the man's flat on a pretext. And Marchmont hadn't been reluctant to show him upstairs, had he? On the contrary, he'd suggested it; plus he'd admitted to knowing Paulin. Which meant he was either very clever – and confident of not being found out – or innocent. What if Miles had got it wrong? What if he was barking up the wrong tree? Had he let his emotions get the better of him? He'd sat for an hour in his car down the road that night, just in case the fat man left the building; but he hadn't, and the lights had gone off at ten.

No, the man was up to no good, he knew it. He'd been happy for Miles to take a look in the flat because he knew there was nothing incriminating to be seen up there. And just because he'd owned up to knowing Paulin didn't mean the association was innocent. Antiques dealer, was he? That wasn't how he'd described himself on the other side of the interview room table. Fence, more like.

Marchmont's connection with Paulin was unlikely to be coincidental, and couldn't possibly be innocent. It was a matter of black and white. You were on the right side or you weren't. But that said, the leads had run out and he'd got precious little to go on. He'd seen Paulin, one rainy night last July, arrive at Marchmont's with an attaché case and leave two hours later with the same case. If he was fencing stolen goods, they'd have to be small ones. Documents, most likely. It was documents the fat man exchanged with Julia. Julia. Would she thank him for

exposing the villain she'd got herself mixed up with? Perhaps not. Always said she wanted the truth, but couldn't see it when it was right under her nose. Marchmont was into something shady; nothing good could come of their association. Since she'd finished with him, Miles had felt all the more need to get to the bottom of whatever it was she was involved in. It was her refusal to accept his judgement on Marchmont that had driven a wedge between them. That and her obsession with her research.

She wasn't the only woman he'd loved, but she was the only one he'd wanted to spend the rest of his life with. He'd known it months ago, brooding over this strange feeling that had taken him by surprise. She wasn't the sort of woman he'd have chosen – she was independent, distant even, sometimes, and often bolshy – but he'd fallen for her, and now she'd broken his heart. It would take him a long time to get over her, but pursuing Marchmont was at least a distraction. And if she saw he'd been right all along, she might have second thoughts.

Tomorrow he'd do a bit of digging into recent document thefts. If he applied enough pressure, Marchmont would crack, eventually. Then they'd all see what he was made of. He stubbed out his cigarette, threw the butt into the road and started the engine.

57.

'Your ex took it hard, didn't he?' said Tom. 'What's his name?'

'Miles. What makes you say that?' she shouted over the music, which she recognized as *Bat out of Hell*. Eclectic tastes, this lot.

'It's not as good as yours,' said Marcus, handing her a glass of white wine. 'But I'll open that bottle of Cab Sauv you brought in a minute.'

'No matter. I've only popped down to wish everyone luck and say goodbye.'

'You couldn't possibly have missed it. Our end-of-year parties are the best in New Cross. And we've got a competition going to see who can get you drunk.'

'What on earth for?'

'We've never seen you drunk. In all the time you've lived here – how long is it now?'

‘Nine, ten months. I don’t often get drunk these days; I can’t stand the hangovers. In any case, I can assure you it’s not a sight worth seeing. Tom, what were you saying about Miles?’

‘I’ll tell you in a minute. Let me introduce you to people. This is Louise, my girlfriend. And this is Clare. Sam and Matt. Julia lives upstairs,’ he explained, ‘a bit like a guardian angel. She helps with our essays and there’s always wine on hand. Plus she sets a good example of working extremely hard – which none of us has ever followed.’

‘You must be much cleverer than I am, in that case, since I hear you’ve been accepted to do a PhD.’

‘And she’s got a mystery French lover.’

‘Sounds interesting,’ said Sarah. ‘Tell us more.’

‘A mystery French lover?’ said Julia. ‘Where’ve you got that from?’

‘I was there when he rang you once, remember? I answered your phone because you were looking for a book I wanted to borrow.’

‘You seem to have read an awful lot into a thirty-second conversation. If those are your skills of deduction, Mr future-psychologist Tom, then I pity your poor clients.’

‘Actually, I’m not going to be that sort of psychologist. But am I right or am I right?’

‘You’re an idiot, Tom, do you know that? He’s helping me ...’

‘With your enquiries. I know. That’s what you said last time. But they’re not mutually exclusive, you know.’

‘I’ll point that out; I might be on to a good thing. In the meantime, you can pour me another glass of wine. But tell me what you were going to say about Miles.’

‘We’ve seen him. Katy and me. Sorry, that’s the doorbell.’

Julia sat on the sofa in the kitchen next to Katrina. The table was littered with babygrows and crocheted cardigans, tiny socks, teething rattles and cuddly toys; the disconcerting paraphernalia of motherhood.

‘You will keep in touch, won’t you, Julia? I’d hate for us to lose contact. Come and see the baby.’

‘Of course I will. Though I’m not good with babies.’

‘Not sure I am either. In fact, Julia, I’m scared shitless.’

‘It’s not that bad, these days. Not like a hundred years ago, when anything could go wrong. Tom says you’ve seen Miles lately.’

‘We’ve seen him hanging around a few times. On the other side of the road.’

‘What do you mean, hanging around?’

‘Just sort of standing there. Usually under that lamp-post just opposite. Looking up at the house.’

‘How long has this been going on? My flat’s at the back; I can’t see the street.’

‘Two, three weeks, perhaps. Tom’s seen him a couple of times in the evenings: eight, nine o’clock. I saw him one morning when I was up being sick. Men. They think they own you, then can’t understand when you make a decision for yourself.’

Julia stood at the window. If Miles was there, she’d go down and have it out with him. But the street was empty except for a few parked cars and a couple of boys on skateboards. Sam came up behind her.

‘Don’t you get sick of London?’

‘Occasionally. The dirt and the noise. Speed and endless movement. But at the same time, those are the things I can’t do without. I feel closer to reality here. To myself. Do you know what I mean?’

‘Not exactly. Not at all in fact. I like being a student here. But I’ll have had enough by the time I’ve qualified. I want to be a GP in a little village somewhere where everyone knows everyone else and the doctor’s a real part of the community.’

‘I grew up in a place like that and I can’t think of anything more dreadful. I couldn’t live anywhere else, now. Except Paris, perhaps.’

‘Ah, there we go,’ said Tom. ‘I rest my case.’

‘Shit, that’s my phone.’

‘Five quid says it’s the French lover,’ shouted Tom.

‘Hi, Mathias. Can I ring you back in five minutes? It’s a bit noisy in here.’

‘Told you,’ said Tom.

‘Tom, what’s got into you tonight?’ She laughed and poked him in the ribs. ‘I don’t believe your plan was to get me drunk; it was to tease me *ad infinitum* till I die of it.’

‘You don’t mind, do you, Julia? It’s just a bit of fun.’ He blew her a kiss as he drifted away to the other side of the room.

‘Actually, my mystery lover is a two-hundred-and-thirty-six-year-old double-agent from Manchester.’ She left the room and stood on the landing.

‘Did I catch you at a bad time?’

‘No, it’s an undergrad party. They’ve started to get silly. As you might have gathered from the inane comments.’

‘I didn’t hear them. I know it’s late. I just thought I’d ring and say hello. I’ve not heard from you for a while.’

‘I ran out of credit; I had to wait till I got paid.’

‘What’s that noise?’

‘It’s someone being sick three feet from me. All of life is here: false logic, accidental pregnancy, excessive drinking, hope for the future.’

‘Is this how you usually spend your Saturday evenings?’

‘No; I’m usually at my desk with a glass of wine. Or at the Greenwich Picture House with a friend.’

The next day it rained. Julia spent the day in her pyjamas, sitting at her desk or on the sofa, working on Richard Turnbull’s notebook. She wasn’t sure what to make of the fact that Miles had been seen hanging about the building. She toyed with the idea of ringing him up and confronting him, but wasn’t sure what it would achieve. She needed to see it for herself.

Peter Marchmont had emailed her a week ago, after a long silence, to suggest a meeting. ‘I have worked my way through Turnbull’s notebook,’ he wrote, ‘and you may be interested in seeing it.’ They’d fixed on the following Thursday evening at seven. How much of her own notebook should she copy for him? She’d decide that later; in the meantime she read on.

> It is perhaps at this point, before I go on to spell out the precise nature of my involvement with Mr Silas W— and Mr — , that I should recount that which I have so far avoided. This is a troubling account to have to make – it pains me to write it, since to write is also to relive – but it is not that alone which has prevented me. I have up to now been incapable of writing this account, which took place early in my life. But as I ambled in the streets of St Giles’s and later drank coffee with Silas W—, it was of my poor mother that I thought; it was as if the two were connected then, and as if they must be connected now, in the telling.
>
> All men who have had good relations with their mothers – and especially if those mothers died when their sons were still young – remember them as angels of light, and I am no exception. Anna Turnbull was the gentlest, sweetest creature who ever lived.

The sweetest creature who ever lived, and an intelligent woman; yet she was taken in by a fiend. What is it that subordinates intelligence to an onslaught of enthusiasm? An influenza of the mind, perhaps.

The day she left us, I had just turned thirteen. Certain scenes stand out in my mind, fixed into my memory like the mark of the branding-iron upon the skin. My father sitting at the breakfast table, the letter in his hand; over his face such a shadow that I thought he had died that moment. When I rushed to shake his shoulder, the look he gave me was both life and death. Later, Jane sobbing into her white apron. My mother's opal ring on the table-cloth.

That day: a point from which all subsequent events in my life have diverged.

The manner of her leaving us – She was in the habit of sitting up after my father had retired to bed – he preferred to retire early and rise with the dawn. On descending to breakfast one morning early in September he found a note addressed to him. Immediately on reading it, he called Jane, the servant girl, who broke down in tears and wept inconsolably when asked if she knew where her mistress might be. The night before, she said, Mrs Turnbull had called her and given her a ring and a letter, instructing her to place the letter upon the dining table when she laid it the next morning. The ring she was to keep, as payment for carrying out the task and as a reward for her years of service. She was to sit up all night and, if my father woke and went looking for his wife, was to produce the letter and say she knew nothing of what had become of Mrs Turnbull. She fished the ring from the pocket of her apron.

— I did not want to take it, she said. I knew from the look on Mrs Turnbull's face that no good would come of it.

My father was silent for some moments; then he took the ring from the table.

— You did no wrong, Jane, he said; but I will keep this. Mrs Turnbull will be returning to us, I am sure of it. He asked her, did she know where my mother had gone? She answered, No, her mistress had not told her. But she feared – here she stopped. – Go on, said my father – What is it you fear, Jane? I fear, she said, that my mistress has run off to that church or chapel or whatever it is they call it – where that round-faced man with the wild eyes is in charge, the one who gives me the horrors. Here she burst into tears again, and my father, whose face had turned an Ash-Wednesday grey and who seemed to have forgotten my presence entirely, sat her upon a chair and poured her a tumbler of water. The breakfast had gone cold, the eggs hardened into a glutinous yellow and the fat from the ham congealed on the plate. My

father sitting once more, I crept to his side; he looked at me with the sad, wild eyes of an animal caught in a trap, and put his arm about my shoulders.

— Jane, do you know the name of this man with the round face who frightens you so? She sat with the tumbler on her knees, looking down at it and shaking.

— It is Mr Enwright, sir. Mr Ezekiel Enwright.

— And how do you know this?

— He has come to the back door on more than one occasion.

— For what purpose? To beg?

— To save our souls.

— And on those occasions, did Mrs Turnbull meet him?

— Oh no, sir. When he comes to the back door, it is hellfire and damnation for the servants. But Mrs Taylor (Mrs Taylor was our cook at the time) shuts the door in his face. She is never afraid of him; she says he is no better than the old tramps who come knocking for kitchen scraps.

— So Mrs Turnbull met him how? my father enquired.

— I'm not sure, sir; I heard say that her friend, Mrs Belmont, introduced them.

— Have you any idea, Jane, where this fellow can be found? Jane had not the slightest idea, but said that Mrs Taylor might know. Mrs Taylor being called, said that he lived on the other side of the Old Bridge, not far from the lying-in hospital. His chapel was in Water-street.

— It is common knowledge, sir. He preaches – screeches we call it; he can never speak but he shouts like the very devil – every Wednesday and Saturday on Dean's-gate – though sometimes the constables move him on. He calls on women to leave their homes – reckons we need a special salvation. One that is to be found at number 42, Water-street. Though it's worse than the workhouse, they say.

— You seem to know a great deal about this reprobate.

— Indeed I do. Before I came to you, I worked for three months on my sister's flower stall off Dean's-gate. Heard it all, week after week. And never heard such nonsense, even in the Madhouse.

My father shook his head sadly. Would to God, Mrs Taylor, that my poor deluded wife had had your good sense. Then, turning to me, and looking me in the eyes, he said, It is true, Richard; she has run off to join this circus. She has abandoned us for what she thinks is God – here he sobbed and stood up, clenching his fists – but what she will find is a tissue of lies woven in a madman's head out of a madman's thoughts and the twisted reading of an ancient text. Your mother has abandoned us, God protect her. She explains all in the letter – though she is as deluded as a Romish peasant who thinks she sees statues weeping blood. He handed me the two pages covered in her

neat hand. – He would not have thought to conceal the facts from me. It was part of his philosophy of life that the truth, however unpalatable, was always better than ignorance or lies, even for a boy of thirteen. You cannot protect from the truth, he used to say; and you must not. However distressing, the truth liberates.

And what of my own relationship with the truth? Many would say that my very nature is a violation of it – that a man who lives a double life is a deceiver. Yet I would say that I have lived as I have precisely in order to be faithful to the truth. The mask may reveal as well as hide.

Men often in later life abandon their early ideals and settle to a steady life. Montagu, for example, owns up to having been a firebrand in his first youth – but by the time I knew him he was a quiet scholar forced to offer the best part of each day to a Moloch called commerce which robbed him daily of the necessary time and energy for study. Am I then an oddity? Perhaps. But it is because I have refused to be chained to the emaciating cares of work and property that I have had the freedom to become the man I am.

My mother did return to us, but broken and wasted, both in mind and body; and with a look of disappointment which I can never forget. A look which remained, despite everything my father and I tried to do for her. She had given all to a God she loved and who, she believed, loved her in return. But she failed to hit the mark with Enwright and his church. A fact which proves the depravity of that establishment; for she, with her gifts and her sweet nature, must have shone amongst them like the sun at dawn. But in her mind it was not only Enwright and his crazy sect who had spewed her out; it was God himself – and from that she never recovered. She believed herself to be beyond redemption.

The inmates in that disgusting place were forced to carry out hard manual labour and subjected to constant invective; she was used to neither. It was customary for those women to be told morning and night that they were in grave danger of losing their immortal souls, of incurring the everlasting wrath of the Maker. They were allowed no personal possessions. The diet was execrable. (Many years later I gained access to one of Enwright's 'Houses of Light' in Shoreditch. He had taken up a different name by then, and a somewhat altered dogma, but he was still the same fiend. I have seen better conditions in Newgate and the bridewells.)

58.

The trial of Henri Jacques de Saint-Gilles, for High Treason

30th January 1813

XIV.

Mr Solicitor-General: Mr Turnbull, I would like you to look at this document and tell me whose handwriting it is.

[Mr Turnbull was shown the document.]

Richard Turnbull: It is my handwriting.

Mr Solicitor-General: And what is the nature of this document?

Richard Turnbull: It is a note inviting Mons. de Saint-Gilles to dine with Mr William Montagu, Mr Bellas and myself at my lodgings in Clapham.

Mr Solicitor-General: Is it not strange that an agent of the government has invited to dinner the very man he later accuses of being a French spy?

Richard Turnbull: The sad fact was, that Mons. de Saint-Gilles and I were friends before he was apprehended as a spy. Mr Montagu likewise is my friend. The three of us dined together two or three times a week; we all lived at that time in Clapham, and spent many hours together.

Mr Solicitor-General: How long had you known the prisoner before you received the commission from Lord Alexander?

Richard Turnbull: For two years.

Mr Solicitor-General: And what were the circumstances of your meeting?

Richard Turnbull: I had settled in Clapham in the spring of 1810. Mons. de Saint-Gilles also made his home there, a month or so after me. We struck up a friendship and I introduced him to Mr Montagu.

Mr Solicitor-General: Yet we have heard from Mr Price that you had a prior acquaintance.

Richard Turnbull: That is correct; I had met Mons. de Saint-Gilles in Paris twenty years before.

Mr Solicitor-General: And the nature of your acquaintance?

Richard Turnbull: We were friends, like-minded young men. We sometimes drank with each other.

Mr Solicitor-General: You were supporters of the Revolution?

Richard Turnbull: At the time, we were.

Mr Solicitor-General: And later?

Richard Turnbull: The Revolution proved to be a monster. I lost contact with Mons. de Saint-Gilles in the turmoil of that time, and did not see him again until the spring of 1810.

Mr Solicitor-General: And what did he tell you of the reason for his removal to Clapham?

Richard Turnbull: I was in fact instrumental in that. He said that he had lived in London since his escape from France in 1794, but that he was in need of tranquillity and of cleaner air than was to be found in London. I procured him lodgings in Clapham next to mine.

Mr Solicitor-General: And you had no inkling, as the months passed and you became better acquainted with him, that Mons. de Saint-Gilles was a wolf in sheep's clothing, a traitor to his adoptive country?

Richard Turnbull: None whatsoever. It was a discovery which dismayed as much as it surprised me.

Mr Solicitor-General: When did you first begin to suspect your friend Mons. de Saint-Gilles?

Richard Turnbull: With the discovery of the seal in the drawer at Litchfield-street. My suspicion was confirmed when the French prisoners told me of the second seal. I knew Mons. de Saint-Gilles to use such seals.

Mr Solicitor-General: You could be sure they were his? They could not have been anyone else's?

Richard Turnbull: I wished – I hoped – they might be. But they were distinctive; and my suspicion was further confirmed when Mr Price showed me the letters that Mons. de Lessac had written to him. The handwriting was that of Mons. de Saint-Gilles.

Mr Solicitor-General: And you can be sure of that also?

Richard Turnbull: As sure as it is possible to be that one handwriting is the same as another. There had been no attempt to disguise it; I knew it at once.

Mr Solicitor-General: Was there any other occurrence which caused you to suspect your erstwhile friend?

Richard Turnbull: There was the matter of my being attacked in the vicinity of Drury Lane.

Mr Solicitor-General: Please explain.

Richard Turnbull: One evening in May of last year, I had been set upon by ruffians.

Mr Solicitor-General: How did this happen, exactly?

Richard Turnbull: I was on my way from the theatre at Covent Garden to the house of an acquaintance in Red Lion Square. I felt the need to make water and turned into an alley. One is less importuned there. But two men must have followed me; they pushed me towards the wall, so I could see neither of them. One of them searched my pockets while the other held me.

Mr Solicitor-General: Their business was robbery, do you think?

Richard Turnbull: I do not think so. They relieved me of a half a guinea, but the one who searched me continued to do so after he had found it.

Mr Solicitor-General: What do you think was the object of his search?

Richard Turnbull: I am uncertain, but I suspected they searched perhaps for a warrant, such as the runners carry.

Mr Solicitor-General: And had you such a warrant?

Richard Turnbull: I had not. I refused to carry one, for the very reason that, if it were found upon me, it would reveal my identity.

Mr Solicitor-General: And did the footpads address you?

Richard Turnbull: The one who held me said that he was about to break my leg for meddling, and that if I continued to meddle, it would be more than my leg that was broken.

Mr Solicitor-General: Yet your leg was not broken?

Richard Turnbull: The watchman happening to enter the alley at that moment, they made off.

Mr Solicitor-General: Did the man who threatened you specify the nature of the meddling of which he accused you?

Richard Turnbull:	No, but I presumed it was my involvement in the hunt for the spy.
Mr Solicitor-General:	You presumed these footpads had been sent by the spy?
Richard Turnbull:	Yes, with the intention of frightening me into abandoning my task.
Mr Solicitor-General:	But you were not frightened?
Richard Turnbull:	No. I reckoned, if he thought it worth the while to send ruffians after me, he must be under some uneasiness. This I found a heartening thought; for I could not see my way myself.
Mr Solicitor-General:	Did you suspect the prisoner at that time?
Richard Turnbull:	No. It was only later, with the discovery of the seals, and of his handwriting, that I began to suspect his identity.
Mr Solicitor-General:	Yet you had been attacked before, had you not, Mr Turnbull?
Richard Turnbull:	That is correct. It was in the autumn of 1810.
Mr Solicitor-General:	And what happened on that occasion?
Richard Turnbull:	I was crossing the Common at Clapham one evening when I was set upon by two men. But I had heard them coming and was ready for them. I fought them off.
Mr Solicitor-General:	Two against one?
Richard Turnbull:	I travel often alone. I am used to defending myself.
Mr Solicitor-General:	And do you think there was any connexion between the two attacks upon your person?
Richard Turnbull:	I do not think so. The Common is a favourite haunt of malefactors.

59.

Late June, the weather hot, the tube stifling. Standing with her briefcase between her legs, holding the overhead rail with one hand and a folded *Guardian* with the other, Julia felt herself sweating under her suit. She scanned the newspaper. *Banker's £2 million pay-off. Iraq veteran commits suicide. Village minister accused of wife's murder.* At London Bridge she bought a tarte aux légumes at the patisserie in the Vaults, engaging in a few words of chit-chat in French with the man behind the

counter. The overground station was barely cooler; she stood and read the paper again until the train arrived, the tart precariously balanced in its paper bag. Five minutes later, at New Cross Gate, she walked to Sainsbury's where she picked up a bag of salad and, from a stand by the entrance, a couple of bottles of Australian Shiraz on half-price offer. Would she ever be able to buy just what she wanted, without always having one eye on the budget? To live in a big house like Clarissa? Probably not. She'd be lucky to get her student debt paid off before she was thirty-five. If you want that sort of money, you go into advertising or marketing or some other form of business, which she had neither aptitude nor inclination for. Either that or marry money, which was equally abhorrent.

Julia's mother had been a secretary and her father a bank clerk who'd made it to deputy manager in a small-town branch. They had welcomed her academic success; she'd been the first in her family to get a degree, which they still saw, even in the uncertain economic climate of the early twenty-first century, as a meal-ticket. But once you've got one degree, what do you want to go and do another for? And a third was quite simply excessive. What she needed was a proper job, and the sooner the better.

The door of her flat locked and bolted, she stepped out of her shoes and flopped in the armchair. Ten-past-six already. Resting her head against the back of the chair, she closed her eyes for a few moments, then sprang into action. Suit in the wardrobe, blouse and underwear in the wash-basket. A quick shower. She missed the old flat with its light wood floors, large white bed and the power shower that massaged her back after a hard day. She put on a pair of summer pyjamas, cool cotton soft on the skin, and retrieved the carrier bag from where she'd abandoned it by the front door. In the kitchen she put the tart and half a bag of salad onto a dinner plate and filled a large glass with the Shiraz. She ate at her desk, reading over her latest transcript from Richard Turnbull's journal.

> Enwright taught that humanity was divided into two groups distinct and disconnected: the redeemed and the damned. It was possible to cross from one to the other – to gain salvation, or to lose it – but once lost it was lost for ever. And the redeemed must withdraw from the world – men and women living in separate quarters – and have no more contact with those considered unregenerate – even husbands and sons, wives,

daughters, mothers. Thus my mother was induced to abandon us, who loved her more than any group of Bible-bigots could ever do.

She was the dupe of her own searing integrity; she believed in a God of her own making, a God who was pure and honest, just and compassionate. Dr Priestley's God, perhaps – an enlightened despot. But the God of Ezekiel Enwright was a monster of a very different colour.

We could have brought her back to health, my father and I, had she not been convinced of her damnation. Or perhaps that notion is false and the consumption was already too far gone. They were both diseases, in a sense – one of the mind and one of the body.

My mother's capacity for reason was something my father had loved in her, all the more for its rarity in a woman. He encouraged her to read and, in the early evening after dinner, they used to sit by the fire in his study and talk together – about the books they had read, the news from London, the Continent and America. (My father had espoused the cause of the American Revolution and followed the reports from the fledgling Republic with interest.) I would often sit between them, on a small chair, holding my hands out to the fire and listening to their sometimes heated disputes – my mother was not afraid of voicing her opinion; confident and articulate, she often bettered my father in argument. But in Enwright's kingdom these things were out of place. One of the cornerstones of his teaching was that the faculty of reason, in man and woman alike, was an instrument of the devil and a source of corruption; it must therefore be eradicated like the blight in corn.

How could a woman of such intelligence become enthralled to a man like Ezekiel Enwright, a madcap preacher whose arguments were nothing more than silly dicta pieced together from a cracked reading of the Scriptures? A grown woman held to ransom by chapbook monsters and nursery tales. She should have known better; but he took her mind by force. A shepherd of the order of Louis XVI, or Robespierre: a tyrant who demanded unquestioning submission.

It is true, perhaps, that men's minds are better suited to reason than women's; but it is not always those who have the greatest gifts who make the best use of them. Certainly those women I have most admired in life – Mme de Grouchy, Mlle de Saint-Gilles, Elizabeth, Mrs Wollstonecraft, Sophie – dear Sophie – have been as sharp-witted as any man; and a woman is a delight who combines the charms of the flesh with those of the mind. I am aware that here I part company with several of my friends, who

would say that a woman is fit only to be one's wife or one's servant – and that a wife is but a superior form of servant. But these are the same men who believe that the best means of preventing revolution in England is to subject her populace to greater and greater despotism. Men, in short, whose judgement I do not trust.

I digress again – but the digression provides a breathing-space; for, though I am now approaching forty years of age, the memory of that scene – the discarded breakfast, the letter with its hastily-torn seal, the look of desolation in my father's eyes – still pains me. Like the letter, hidden in a pocket of my greatcoat, that memory is tucked away in a deep pocket of my mind; though I now seldom take it out and look at it, it will never leave me.

My father, after questioning Jane and Mrs Taylor, unlocked a cabinet, loaded his two pistols and left the house, bidding me stay where I was in case my mother returned of her own accord. I sat by the unlit fire in his study, locking the door to prevent Jane from entering. For, though soft and docile before my father, with her tears and trembling, she was a harpy to me, and never missed the opportunity to pinch or slap me for the slightest misdemeanour. She had been my mother's servant before her marriage and had her confidence; my mother was thus disinclined to believe my tales of her cruelty.

I had taken the letter from my father's empty breakfast plate and now read it. I have it still; even in Paris in '93 and '94 I kept it, sewn into the collar of one shirt or another. It would not have gone well with me had it been discovered – but the very risk of that thrilled me, perhaps, in those days – and I could in any case no more be parted from it than I could from my own mind.

It was full of words not her own. Poor deluded woman! She had taken the empty promises of the fiend, and filled them with her own delusions – like a child who sees the sun rise on a May Sunday and imagines herself running wild in the grass and lying by the hedgerows, but is forced to spend the day in a dreary chapel or sitting still in a lifeless parlour. She had miscalculated the return on her enthusiasm.

My father used all the channels he could to win her back. The chief magistrate, Mr Binney, was privately of the opinion that Enwright was a public nuisance and that were his chapel to burn to the ground it would be no great misfortune; but there were several gentlemen of influence whose attitude was more benign; Enwright's teaching they held to be a useful corrective to the notions of Liberty and Rights which were beginning to be voiced amongst the people of the town; they therefore believed he should be left alone. He could charm when he wanted, and his doctrine of submission to temporal authority diverted attention from his more nefarious practices. Binney said

that if a man's wife ran away he had the right to fetch her back, by force if need be; but this my father could not bring himself to do.

At the chapel itself he was refused entry, both on the morning of her leaving us and on subsequent occasions. The building – a dilapidated house in Water-street – was guarded by two slab-sided young men who stood sentry in the inner hall. They told my father that no man was allowed in the chapel except for the Pastor, and they proved as impervious to bribery as to threat. My father tried to pretend he was the apothecary, come to bleed and administer potions to the inmates; but at this one of them sniggered and said that he should know in that case, that not even the Apothecary was allowed past those doors.

— And when the inmates are ill? said my father. Even those detained in the New Bailey may summon Physician or Apothecary if they have the means.

— These ladies have no need of the Physician.

— You mean they are never ill?

— No, God knows they are often sick. But when they are, the Almighty cures them.

— Or he takes them to himself, said the other. A victory either way, without the expense of medical men.

My father was totally unsuited for the task he set himself. He was unused to violence – had never used his pistols, which he kept only in case of burglars – and had little propensity for subterfuge, which might have been the best means of reclaiming my mother. Four months passed – a winter of such desolation that only one other compares with it, when I lived half-starved and in constant fear of arrest, mourning a different loss. He could not reconcile himself to her departure, and said one day, 'I had rather she had died.' He grew thin – now and then eating as if food were to be eradicated from the face of the earth, but more often than not taking hardly anything. When he was not out importuning the magistrates or pursuing Enwright, he sat in silence behind a locked door.

In February, in a bitter sleeting wind which ripped through me – I had trundled home from school in it, exulting in its painful harshness – my mother returned home with only a light cloak of coarse fabric to protect her. Any joy we might have experienced at her return was blunted by the sight of her. Little more than a skeleton, her skin now pallid and rough – there were sores round her mouth – she looked like an old woman, her shoulders bent, her hair dull, the laughter gone from her eyes. She complained of a pain in her side; her breathing was shallow and uneven. Yet, as I sat by her side that evening, my head against her shoulder and her hand in mine, I was too taken up with joy at her return to see the all-too-obvious signs of her impending death.

That night she took to her bed and never left it. She was ill-fitted for the arduous régime of the chapel, its laborious and menial tasks; the hours of work – from 6 in the morning till 10 at night each day except Sunday, with a half-hour for dinner at 2 in the afternoon – were calculated to destroy both body and spirit in the shortest possible time. And this on a diet of hard coarse bread with a thin porridge, and on Sundays a foul mutton stew or a piece of old bacon. The soul flourishes, it seems, when the body is thus mortified in Heaven's manufactory.

She would have died at the Chapel, in what she thought was a state of grace, had it not been for her solicitude for her fellows. She had the temerity to complain at the conditions: a young girl in an advanced stage of consumption was denied rest and expected to continue her duties as normal, and my mother was heard to utter the words, 'Surely this cannot be the will of God!' This rebellious outburst was reported to the overseer and she was summoned to the office of the Pastor, where she was warned that, if she did not submit to the Rule, she would be declared a reprobate and ejected. She continued for a few weeks without drawing attention to herself, but had cause to speak out again at the ill-treatment of two elderly women who were whipped for dropping a heavy basket of laundry. This time she was told that her residence in God's house was at an end; her spirit was intractable and infected by Satan and she must leave at once. Yet it was the anguish of her soul, more than the sickness of her body, which broke her. She had failed to attain salvation; and though it was they who had spewed her out, she could never forgive herself for it.

She died in early March, when the crocuses were beginning to push up in the garden, the winter days lengthening. The house was cold – my father oblivious to everything except her, and Jane unsure if she should light fires or not – but my mother's room was hot, stuffy with continual fires and the sickly stench of illness and medicaments. Doctor Harriot, my father's Physician, attended her daily, but more out of friendship than for any good he might do; he had told my father honestly, on first seeing her, that all that could be done was to ease the pain a little. — She will sink fast, he said. I am sorry, Robert, but it is the way of it. My father hardly left her side, slept in a chair by her bed, eating seldom. — For God's sake, Robert, you will wear yourself out, you know, said Harriot one day as my father half-rose from the chair dishevelled and haggard. How long is it since you slept in your own bed? Ate a meal? Took a walk?

— It is for God's sake that she has come to this, retorted my father; you have no doubt heard the sorry story. And how many others are there in that place, sick and ill-used? Worse-off even than her, because they have no one to support them when they

are turned out. The doctor said nothing, merely rested his hand on my father's shoulder a moment.

I watched with him when I was not at school. I think we each derived some comfort from the notion that she would not die alone; that the two of us, who loved her most truly, were to share her last moments.

She died begging for forgiveness. I thought it was my father she begged, but he told me some years later that he could not be certain of this, that it might have been God she was imploring. We buried her in a corner of St Ann's churchyard, with the rites of the Anglican church. She had, in one of her lucid spells, implored my father to send for the Rector there, so she could make her peace with the church. The Rector sent one of his curates, a tall young man dressed in black who ruffled my hair and bade me leave the room while they talked. Later, he found me moping in the drawing-room and talked kindly to me – though I no longer recall what he said.

From then on, my father's only desires were to walk each day to her grave and to bring Enwright to justice. His business was neglected and by April of the next year he was ruined.

A line was ruled under this passage, but another two paragraphs had been added – presumably, Julia thought from the way they were squashed into the remaining space on the page – at a later date:

Though in the end my father succeeded in effecting the closure of Enwright's chapel, he failed to retrieve my mother's locket. This had been his wedding gift to her, an oval of gold with an intricate design, in which she kept two locks of hair: one of his – dark and straight – and another of mine, a fair curl cut off when I was still an infant, before my hair turned black. On her deathbed she had fretted over its absence, her fingers groping convulsively at her neck. My father assumed she had taken it with her to the chapel; but when interrogated, Enwright insisted that the women entering the institution were not allowed to bring with them any item of personal property. Had she brought the locket with her, it would have been confiscated; even the clothes the women arrived in were removed and a new set given out, a sort of inferior habit – the fustian gown and light cloak in which she had returned home. The wretch then made a show of checking the strongbox in which, he said, those possessions brought in were stored before they were sold – and the money given to the poor, he was quick to add. My father suspected otherwise – that these items were kept, or sold for personal profit

– but since he had no hope of establishing the facts, he came away empty-handed and dejected.

The closure of the chapel was a result of Enwright's being arraigned for bigamy; he who had preached that marriage was an inferior state had, it seems, married one woman in Lancashire and a second in secret upon coming to Manchester. But by some trickery he was able to flee the city before the matter came to trial; he went to ground God-knows-where, re-emerging years later like a recrudescence of a particularly noxious disease. My father took some credit for this turn of events; for he had tracked down the disgruntled ex-member of the men's chapel who was prepared to bring the accusation against Enwright. He received little reward for his pains, however, except his own satisfaction. Some of those released after the chapel's closure blamed him for having destroyed their home; they had been happy there, they said, and my father had brought them grief and misfortune.

Enwright was not listed in the *Dictionary of National Biography* or the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Not surprising, really. But a Google search threw up a biography of one Ezekiel Enwright in an online *Dictionary of British Sects*. This revealed something which Julia already half-suspected: that Ezekiel Enwright and Ezekiel Juggins were one and the same person.

William Ezekiel Enwright (1756-1812), self-styled prophet and founder of two sects: the Chapel of Holy Light in Manchester and the English New Gospel sect.

Little is known of his early life. His father, Henry, was a member of the Manchester gentry, his mother the daughter of a well-to-do tenant farmer. William was the second child of six; two years separated him from an elder brother – Henry Isaac – and there were four younger sisters, of whom nothing is known. William followed his beloved brother to Cambridge in 1773, was ordained in 1778 and obtained a curacy in Heysham in Lancashire in 1779. Henry Isaac died of consumption the following year; William's reaction to his brother's death was severe and left him prone to frequent periods of melancholia and despair, interspersed with bouts of frenzied ecstasy. No doubt these states of mind would today be treated as some form of mental illness, but Enwright (and his followers) perceived them as a sign of divine favour, and they led to the first of his conversion experiences. 'While walking one day across a field of scythed hay, in a state of miserable dejection,' he later wrote, 'I was touched by the Holy Ghost and everything around me shimmered with new-born light. For, although I was a minister in the established church, I myself

had walked in darkness until that moment.' It was then that he renounced his ordination (although he was to keep the title 'Reverend' for the rest of his life), moved to Manchester and, using his middle name, Ezekiel, set up the Chapel of Holy Light. His followers were drawn mainly from the Manchester working-class – semi-skilled workers and casual labourers – but he nonetheless found several supporters (and perhaps even a few disciples) amongst the local middle-class and gentry.

Enwright's doctrine seems to have emphasized the certainty of an afterlife for those who lived a life of simplicity, chastity and submission to authority (his own, of course, and that of the state). Wealth was a hindrance to true spirituality and members were encouraged to surrender what wages they had into a common fund to enrich the chapel and facilitate the spreading of the gospel. Later, a communal life was urged – and possibly forced – upon believers, with segregation of the sexes. Marriage was seen as an inferior state and sexual intercourse frowned upon except for the begetting of children, the flock of the future. (The practicalities of this remain unclear.)

The Chapel of Holy Light came to an abrupt end with the accusations made against Enwright in 1788 by Thomas Jenkinson, a former church member who had been threatened with excommunication and damnation. Enwright, he claimed, had left one wife in Heysham and married another in Manchester. However, Jenkinson also denounced what he called 'the ungodly opulence of this preacher of poverty and simplicity'.

Although the accusation of bigamy was true, the case did not come to trial, and it is at this point that Enwright disappears from the record. It was only with the groundbreaking research of Anna Geraghty in the 1960s that the remainder of his life came to light. Ms Geraghty has shown convincingly that William Ezekiel Enwright resurfaced in London in 1795 as the eccentric preacher Ezekiel Juggins. A second conversion had opened his eyes to what he called the 'inner truth' and a new identity gave him immunity from the law. Reborn as Juggins, he now preached what he called the 'New Gospel'. 'It was on the moors of Yorkshire,' he wrote in *The Sinner Redeemed* (1805) 'that the Almighty told me three things. First, that this sublunary world would be brought to an end on the first day of the year 1825. Second, that it would please Him to save those who bowed the knee to Him and to His prophet. Third, that I was called to be that Prophet.' The break with his old life was complete; he never referred to his Manchester congregation, or to his old faith, or his old wife, again.

He became an itinerant preacher and, over the next few years, refined his new doctrine into a fully-fledged system, which he expressed in three leisurely volumes published in 1805. *The Sinner Redeemed; or, the Glorious Intercession of our Saviour*

and the Redemption of Men, by Ezekiel Juggins, BA, is a work as dry, contradictory and – in places – ridiculous as it is opaque. It is difficult to summarize the theology expounded in this work, since an argument developed for fifty pages in one chapter is usually contradicted in a later one. The following comment by Ms Geraghty perhaps gives us some idea of its nature: 'Juggins's doctrine is a complex mixture of biblical concepts and authoritarian pronouncements, with himself centre-stage as the only conduit for God's wisdom.'

Juggins's dealings with women were particularly cruel and unpalatable, even by the standards of his own day. Through an intricate system of 'stages' – all of which involved self-abasement and hard manual labour (the 'proper sphere' of a woman) 'purification', though not salvation, could be attained. The best a woman could hope for was to be purified and accepted into the heavenly kingdom, where she would serve as a subordinate to the company of angelic men; 'a downgrading,' notes Ms Geraghty, 'even from the traditional Christian view of women'. It is interesting, however, that Juggins reviled the traditional 'male' qualities of logic and reason; the 'truly spiritual man' was made in a Rousseauean mould, a man of intuition who gave his emotions free rein.

In 1805, Juggins settled in London and the following year set up a Mission in Shoreditch organized, like the earlier Manchester chapel, on semi-monastic principles; although it seems that discipline was less strict in this institution. Rumours even circulated of sexual laxity encouraged by the Revd. Juggins, but it is difficult to tell if these were malicious fabrications or founded in fact.

Towards the end of his life Juggins seems to have become increasingly vociferous in his condemnation of earthly power and in his certainty that the world was soon to end. Napoleon Bonaparte, King George III and the Prince Regent were all denounced as the Antichrist. But Juggins was not to live to see the failure of his prophecy. On the night of 5th September, 1812, he was stabbed to death in a London back-street. Although he had made many enemies over the years, there is no evidence to suggest that this was anything other than a chance attack by street-thieves or even link-boys. With the death of its leader, the sect died out; no doubt his belief that the world would end in 1825 made the training of a successor unnecessary.

The only full-length biography of Enwright/Juggins is Geraghty's *Chameleon of God: The Double Life of William Ezekiel Enwright and Ezekiel Juggins* (Gollancz, 1969). His millenarian views are discussed in Peter Camborne, *The End of the World: Theologies of Doom and the Hermeneutics of Power* (Penguin, 1974). An extensive and insightful discussion of his position on women is to be found in Jenna

Westonbury, *Women, Men and God: the Eternal Skewed Triangle* (Methuen, 1977), Chapter 7.

The fact that Richard Turnbull held Juggins responsible for his mother's death made sense of his later obsessive hatred of the man. It begged the question of whether his acceptance of the Government commission in 1812, his subsequent investigation of Juggins and the latter's death, were in any way connected to that early episode in his life.

60.

Peter Marchmont drummed his fingers on the table and looked at his watch. Their most important meeting, and she was late. Of course, she could have no idea of its importance; she'd probably just got held up at work or on the tube, or something. She was usually very punctual. Had she ever told him what she did, apart from being a research student? He knew she worked, but hadn't asked where, or even what she did. Never sure how far to go in a conversation, always cautiously backing off in case he overstepped the mark. He took a swig of his bitter, forced himself to remain calm, quietly sitting in the corner of the Windmill looking at the menu.

'I'm sorry, Peter,' she said when she arrived out-of-breath at the table, 'there was a hold-up at Vauxhall.' She put down her briefcase and took off her raincoat.

'No matter. Glad you could make it.' He passed her the menu. 'I'm going to order the steak and kidney pudding.'

Julia ordered a seafood salad and a glass of Chardonnay. He said nothing about what he was going to give her that night. The notebook would change everything; but it would speak for itself. No one would have guessed his heart was pounding against his ribs. When the food arrived, he asked for another beer and cut into his pudding with relish.

'I enjoy eating out,' he said. 'I spend so much of my time cooking for others.'

'I like your menu,' said Julia. 'An excellent mix of modern and traditional. There aren't many places you can buy an ordinary sandwich these days, one made with real bread and butter.'

'A traditional English sandwich.' He smiled. 'With authentic ingredients.'

‘What did you think of that document I gave you last time?’

‘What of it?’

‘It suggests that Henri de Saint-Gilles was not only in favour of the Revolution, but worked as an informant for the revolutionary government.’

‘As I said, there’s no way it can be proved to be authentic. Oh, it’s probably written by Turnbull, but what if he made it up? Can you prove that Turnbull’s writings are accurate, as opposed to versions of events intended to obfuscate?’

‘But versions of events are all we have; in this case, at least. And it’s not constructive to make a blanket statement that everything someone has written is largely untrue. That’s going a bit far, isn’t it?’

‘I wouldn’t put anything past Turnbull.’

‘But Henri’s support for the Revolution is substantiated.’

‘How?’

‘Both his sisters mention it. One of them, Manon, left a substantial diary, the other just a couple of letters. They both confirm Henri’s enthusiasm for the Revolution.’

‘In its early days, maybe. He changed his tune after that. Now, shall we get down to business?’ He pushed his plate aside, lifted his battered leather bag onto his knee and handed her the customary brown envelope. ‘Turnbull’s journal. As promised. I’m trusting you with the real thing.’ He watched as she took the envelope and glanced inside it. You see, Henri, how far we’ve come. ‘And what have you got for me?’ he said aloud, draining his glass.

‘Copies of documents written by Turnbull in 1812, while he was on the trail of the French spy. Interesting, because he goes back into his past: his time in London in 1791 and 1792; an episode in his childhood. And the beginning of my translation of Manon’s diary.’ She handed them over. ‘It’s a bit like something out of a spy story,’ she said with a smile, ‘all this passing documents to each other in brown envelopes.’

She’d arranged to meet Peter Marchmont after work that evening so that Miles would be less likely to follow her. Tom and Katrina had been right; she’d seen him hanging round the house a couple of times. If she looked out of the tiny landing-window she could see the lamp-post where he chose to stand, the look on his face a mixture of hang-dog and defiant. She’d been out to challenge him once, but he’d been truculent and said he could stand in the street if he wanted, and she’d given up and gone back inside again.

She felt uneasy about the notebook Marchmont had given her. Guiltily, she opened the envelope again and took another quick look; black leather, not unlike the one she'd retrieved from Bank House, but in better condition. She'd not mentioned that one – 'her' notebook – this time; was that because she'd only just started to decipher the encoded passages? How fortunate she hadn't given herself away and shown Peter the notebook, only to have him inform her that the Greek passages were transliterations; that would have been embarrassing.

But he'd shared more with her than she had with him. The notebook itself, this time, and not just photocopies. He obviously trusted her. Well, there was no reason she shouldn't give him more documents next time; she'd probably have got through the journal by then. She needn't feel guilty about it; he was unlikely to have been motivated by generosity. What was he going to do with his findings? He'd always been vague about that.

As she walked up the road from New Cross Gate, she saw that Miles had taken up his position opposite the house. Suit and tie: he must have come from work. She was tired and wanted to flick through the notebook before she went to bed; she had to be up at six the next day.

'Go home, Miles. We split up; it happens. You won't make anything better by standing here behaving like a teenager. Or do I have to call the police?'

'I am the police, remember? Or have you forgotten everything about me?'

'You're not exactly acting like an officer of the law, are you?'

'What does that mean?'

'It means you're behaving like an idiot. It's over, Miles. I'm sorry it hurts, but you won't make it better by standing out here and trying to intimidate me.'

'I know better than to try and intimidate you.'

'So what are you doing here? I could get you arrested, you know that.'

'Are you that vindictive?'

'I'm not vindictive at all; and I really don't want the hassle. It wouldn't ever have worked out between us, can't you see that? We're diametrically opposed.'

'I'm not interested in your excuses. There's someone else, there has to be.'

'So you're standing there to prove yourself right? You'll wait a long time, Miles. In any case, it wouldn't be any different if there was someone else; that's not why we split up.'

'So who've you been seeing tonight, then?'

‘Just Peter.’

‘Oh, it’s Peter now, is it?’

It had started to rain. ‘Go home, Miles,’ she said, gently now, suddenly exhausted and struck by the pathos of his desire; her anger melting with the rain. But he pulled her towards him and kissed her, his tongue probing her mouth and his hands gripping her arms. She struggled free.

‘Try that again and it’ll be a knee in the groin and I really will call the police. You’re a bloody idiot, Miles, you really are.’

But as she slammed the front door behind her, she felt a wave of pity. Not that anything could be done about it, but perhaps he didn’t deserve the pain she’d caused him. Or brought upon himself. She plodded up the stairs to her flat, locked and bolted the door, poured herself a large glass of Rioja and took Peter Marchmont’s notebook from her briefcase.

> When I drew near to London in the year 1825, and stood looking down at the city from the village of Hampstead, I wondered that I had ever been so eager to leave it.

She flipped through the pages and read at random.

> This my last notebook – for I feel the approach of death, his hand on my shoulder.
>
> Yet even now I feel the difficulty of a full confession –
>
> Helter-skelter, ragged of mind, I ran through the streets of Paris.
>
> I was born at Manchester on the 9th of May in the year 1774.
>
> In the year 1788, however, a calamity struck our household, from which our little family never recovered.

61.

The trial of Henri Jacques de Saint-Gilles, for High Treason

30th January 1813

XV.

Mr Solicitor-General: Mr Turnbull, did you uncover any further evidence that Mons. de Saint-Gilles was spying on behalf of the French Republic?

Richard Turnbull: I made a trip to Paris in October of last year.

Mr Solicitor-General: For what reason?

Richard Turnbull: First, to establish, if I might, the identity of the man who collected the documents carried by Captain Barclay to the harbour-master at Calais.

Mr Solicitor-General: You travelled with Captain Barclay?

Richard Turnbull: I did; although we did not acknowledge our prior acquaintance.

Mr Solicitor-General: And what did you discover at Calais?

Richard Turnbull: The box of letters deposited by Captain Barclay was collected from the harbour master within an hour by a young man, with whom I travelled in the Paris diligence the next day.

Mr Solicitor-General: A young man known to you?

Richard Turnbull: No; he was a stranger.

Mr Solicitor-General: Did you learn his name?

Richard Turnbull: It was Mons. Villiers.

Mr Solicitor-General: And what did this Mons. Villiers do with the letters in Paris?

Richard Turnbull: He delivered them the next day to a gentleman in the rue Saint-Antoine.

Mr Solicitor-General: And what then?

Richard Turnbull: The following day I also called upon this gentleman.

Mr Solicitor-General: Whose name was?

Richard Turnbull: Monsieur Bassompierre.

Mr Solicitor-General: And this gentleman was also unknown to you?

Richard Turnbull: He was. But I had a letter of introduction to him, written by the prisoner.

Mr Solicitor-General: By the prisoner?

Richard Turnbull: That is what I led him to believe. In fact, I had written the letter myself, in Mons. de Saint-Gilles's handwriting, after learning the gentleman's name.

Mr Solicitor-General: And to what end did you present this letter?

Richard Turnbull: To confirm the identity of the spy. If Mons. Bassompierre upon reading the letter accepted me as part of Mons. de Saint-Gilles's network, as it asked him to do, then I would know that the prisoner was in fact operating as a spy on behalf of the French Republic.

Mr Solicitor-General: And did Mons. Bassompierre accept the letter as genuine?

Richard Turnbull: He did. In fact, once he had seen the letter, he confirmed that the prisoner was working under his command.

Mr Solicitor-General: He mentioned the prisoner by name?

Richard Turnbull: He did. He said Mons. de Saint-Gilles was of great value to the Republic.

Mr Solicitor-General: And what did you ascertain regarding Mons. Bassompierre's association with Mons. de Saint-Gilles?

Richard Turnbull: That the prisoner was part of a large network of spies working for Buonaparte's government; a network which extended not just to France and England but to several other countries. That Mons. Bassompierre reported directly to Mons. le duc de Rovigo, the French minister of police.

Mr Solicitor-General: He told you this freely?

Richard Turnbull: I had hinted, that I might be induced to offer my services to him. He talked, however, only in those vague terms; he provided no other material details. But I wanted only confirmation that Mons. de Saint-Gilles was working for the French government.

Mr Solicitor-General: And you stayed in Paris how long?

Richard Turnbull: Just three days. The day after my meeting with Mons. Bassompierre, I took the next diligence to Calais, and travelled from there to Dover.

Mr Solicitor-General: You sailed again with Captain Barclay?

Richard Turnbull: No; the *Christabel* had already sailed. I took another boat.

Mr Solicitor-General: Capt. Barclay did not then carry letters from France to England?

Richard Turnbull: I believe he was occasionally required to do so, but that the letters were always waiting for him at the harbour-master's office when he came to deposit the fresh batch of letters from England. He was never requested to wait longer than the tide required.

Mr Solicitor-General: And what did you do upon arrival in London?

Richard Turnbull: It was then that I prevailed upon Mr Price to turn King's Evidence.

Mr Solicitor-General: And when was that, exactly?

Richard Turnbull: By the middle of November I had Mr Price's word and the letters he had procured for me in the spy's handwriting. It was then that I made my report to Lord Alexander. The prisoner was arrested at the end of that month.

Mr Solicitor-General: I ask you now, Mr Turnbull, an important question. You have admitted to forging a letter in the prisoner's handwriting, an act which many will view with suspicion; I have no doubt that others – my learned friend included – will ask, how may we trust a man who openly admits to such a grave and questionable deed? How can we be certain, that you have not forged other letters in the prisoner's hand; the letters given you by Mr Price, for example?

Richard Turnbull: Because I should not then have admitted to forging the letter I gave to Mons. Bassompierre. The case against Mons. de Saint-Gilles rests, moreover, on demonstrable facts other than the production of those documents given me by Mr Price. I admit that the forgery of a letter is a dubious act and does not befit a man of honour. I can say in my defence, only that in the dark sphere of intelligence and espionage one cannot always play the gentleman. It is a world predicated upon duplicity and dishonesty, and it can proceed in no other fashion. Any man who enters that world, even in the service of his country, is not only tainted by the corruption which inheres in it, but is obliged to live by it.

62.

Julia nodded to the commissionaire and walked through the revolving doors of the hotel, saw Mathias Fournier sprawled on a leather sofa in the lounge-bar reading the *Times*. A pianist in the corner was playing light jazz, amorphous and unplaceable.

'You turned up at just the right time,' she said, kissing him lightly on the cheek as he stood to greet her. 'I feel like a prisoner who's just been released.'

'You look very elegant. Have I dragged you away from something?'

'My cousin's wedding party. But consider it more as a rescue – for which you have my undying gratitude.'

'Ah, so your *empressement* has less to do with enthusiasm for my company than with getting out of an onerous task?'

'Correct. But I don't spend my Saturday evenings with just anyone, you know.'

'It wasn't fun, then?'

'Very definitely not. Endless social niceties, platitudes, clichés. Can I get you a drink? You seem to have finished yours, and I need anaesthetizing.'

As she stood at the bar waiting to be served she caught a glimpse of Miles out of the corner of her eye. But when she turned her head there was no-one there. Get a grip. 'They want it to be me next time,' she said to Fournier, putting down a double gin and tonic and a glass of Bordeaux. 'The next victim for the Minotaur. But,' she smiled, 'that's the last thing I'm going to complain about.'

Aunt Poppy had been triumphant, Nora Dalton faintly petulant. 'Isn't that just the most beautiful dress?' she'd whispered. 'It cost over a thousand pounds.' Julia, who spent less than half that sum on clothes in a year, wondered how such a price was arrived at for a swathe of plain fabric with neither sleeves nor straps. She nonetheless understood the unspoken text between them: *Why can't it be you?*

'Anyway, what are you doing in London on a Saturday evening?'

He loosened his tie. 'A conference. Postmodern interpretations of history.'

'And how many are there?'

'How many what?'

'Postmodern interpretations of history.'

'They're innumerable; I thought you'd know that. Would you like to eat now or later?'

‘Later would be fine. There was a finger buffet at the wedding. In a marquee in the grounds of Harry’s parents’ house in Twickenham. She’s married money, as well as making hods of it herself. The champagne was good, but there was only one glass each.’

‘Well,’ he said, taking a small package from under one of the Saturday supplements. ‘This might cheer you up.’

‘What is it?’

‘Open it and see. An early birthday present. It is Wednesday, isn’t it?’

‘How did you know it was my birthday?’

‘I’m not a researcher for nothing, you know.’

‘Ha.’ She opened the package. It was a small book, leather-bound with intricately marbled blue and grey endpapers. She translated its title. *Manual for young ladies brought up by their parents or in religious communities. 1769.*

‘I thought you might find it of historical interest. I bought it from Jean-Michel. He sends his regards.’

‘It’s beautiful. Thank you.’

‘And a bottle of champagne? To celebrate.’

‘That’s very kind of you. If I’m ever rich, I’ll drink champagne all the time. Like Churchill.’

‘And smoke cigars?’

‘No, I’ll pass on that. But thank you. For the book and the champagne. But how did you know about my birthday? Really.’

‘I telephoned Yvette at the Academy. She asked your manager there. The simplest solutions are often the best. And do your parents still think you’re engaged to Patrick?’

‘No, I sorted that out before the wedding. Otherwise they’d have been telling everyone. Lies are such complex things; I now have a totally hypothetical ex-boyfriend who has to be committed to memory unless I want my deception to come out. I’m never going to do it again.’

‘Were they disappointed?’

‘Terribly; I feel very bad about it. They think their lives and mine are somehow provisional until I get married; but that’s the last thing I want. I seem to be upsetting everybody at the moment. But at least,’ – she took a large mouthful of gin – ‘they were happy for me to leave the party when I told them I was going to see a man.’

‘My parents keep telling me I should marry again. It’s the only thing they pester me about.’

‘And would you?’

‘We were happy. I know you’d say that’s an appalling cliché, but in fact it’s true.’

‘But?’

‘Why but?’

‘There’s always a but. Especially where relationships are concerned.’

‘I loved her and I watched her die, slowly, of a disease no science could cure. I know people get ill and die, it’s a fact of life; but I’m not sure I want to invest so much in a relationship again.’

She took a sip of champagne. The music changed to a Michael Nyman piece, full of rippling intensity.

‘How did she die?’

‘A rare form of cancer. There was nothing they could do, except manage the pain. I suppose one should be thankful for that.’

‘It’s the one thing, isn’t it? Death. The one thing for which there’s no answer. It must have been awful for you.’

‘But tell me how your thesis is coming on.’

‘That,’ she said, stabbing a fat green olive with a cocktail stick, ‘is the least problematic area of my life, even though I’m not sure where I’m going with it. There’s just so much material.’

‘That might lead to your next research project.’

‘Perhaps. I can’t think beyond this one.’

‘Research projects are like lovers: the relationship is all-encompassing for a while, but it describes a curve: up and then down.’

‘Except the transition from one to another is usually less messy. Don’t ask,’ she said as he raised his eyebrows. She looked round the room, squinting into the dim nooks and corners. Nothing. Must have imagined it. He couldn’t possibly have known she was coming here, could he? She hadn’t known herself until an hour or so ago.

But when she left, at nearly midnight, she scanned the room again. Then she put her arms round Fournier and kissed him. If Miles was lurking in a corner, that was bound to elicit some response.

‘You’ll be OK getting home?’

‘Yes, it’s only a stone’s throw to the tube station.’

‘You could stay, if you wanted.’

‘Another time, perhaps. I’m not quite myself tonight.’

‘What about lunch tomorrow, then? Or are you busy?’

‘I’m meeting my parents for tea at four-thirty, but lunch would be fine. I know a nice little place, not far from here. I’ll pick you up at 12.30.’

The air on the other side of the revolving doors was cool now. She walked down Regent Street towards Oxford Circus, without looking back.

The next morning she read a few pages of the journal.

Calais, 20th October, 1812

The business having necessitated my removal from London for some days, I am temporarily cut off from it. This suits me; I am sick of its miasmas and its stinking inhabitants – high as well as low. There is to be found in that city a putrefaction of body and soul which turns the stomach. The stench of honest shit in a cowshed I can bear more easily than that of corruption and privilege.

Yet I am myself part of the corruption I vilify. I cannot help this; I merely observe it. I could better endure my present task could I believe wholeheartedly in the rightness of its cause. Believe I do, but not without hesitation. Were I to weigh both sides of this task – the extent to which it will aid my country in its fight against its enemies, and the extent to which it will merely buttress the strongholds of power and privilege – I fear at best the balance would be equal. It is unlikely now that my old ideals will be realised in my lifetime. Reform in time of war is impossible; and merely to express an opinion nowadays lays one open to the ravages of the apparatus of state – an apparatus of which I am now a part.

When last in Manchester – on my wild goose chase after that poxed pustule Juggins – I dined with Tom Fitzroy, who asked me, did I not find London too radical for my liking? Tom, it seems, has turned Tory these past few years; is it, I wonder, the coming into his inheritance or the approach of middle-age, which has done that for him? I replied, I found London not radical enough, and looked over my shoulder, saying half in jest that I could expect to be apprehended for that remark.

It sits not quite comfortably upon me, this rôle; it is another man’s part. I envy others their certainty. I find I cannot embark upon a thing, but that I straitway begin to see the contrary position, so that my thoughts must ever be in a state of flux; and at times – when I have walked far, twenty or thirty miles, with little or no food; or when

I am lying on a summer night by a haystack staring at the silver brilliance of Vega or the gawky angularity of Hercules – it seems that there are not merely contrary positions but a myriad of possible alternatives between one and the other.

But with my removal from England came a welcome shedding of my ill-fitting costume. I boarded Mr Barclay's cutter and, somewhere on the grey and chopping sea, out of sight of land, I metamorphosed myself and landed at Calais as the merchant Monsieur Darblay.

It is as if there were inside me not one man but a multiplicity of beings, a multitude of potential lives. Is it for this that I have never chosen a destiny? I mused on these things as I stood by the harbour wall, seemingly waiting for the *Janus*, due that day with goods from America, but in reality keeping an eye on the harbour-master's office, to see who would follow Barclay and lay claim to the packet of documents he carried.

Six weeks spent travelling the length and breadth of England following that whoreson Juggins. I had no doubt after a certain time that he was of no danger to the state; but his contact with the house in Litchfield-street justified my following him still, for my own ends, which I must needs conceal from my employers. Not that they would have sighed over the fate of a messianic jumper; on the contrary, when J. met his death, Lord A., on hearing the news at dinner the next afternoon, exclaimed that a toast must be drunk, since 'Providence makes use even of the random acts of footpads'. (I had this from Hawkins, with whom I have had some slight contact in mouldy taverns, when it has been necessary to exchange information.)

I got what I wanted in the end – though I had to have him up against a wall with a knife to his throat. He squirmed rather more than I would have expected such a great friend of the Almighty to do. How he trembled! The lips which had whispered sickly spiritual lies now invoked his God in desperation. Of what avail his spiritual circumcision then? His hierarchies of salvation? His surety of damnation for all who disobeyed him?

If I thought for one moment that the eternal father existed, I would hold him, too, responsible for the first calamity of my life; as the matter stands, I impute all blame to the human minion – who, as Lord A. was correct to remark, met a just death; but not until I had retrieved what was rightfully mine.

It is in the circumstances of our origins that we find the direction of our lives.

As he handed over the golden locket, my mother's interment sprang to mind – my father and I her only mourners on that bitter March morning. (Even Montagu, my closest and dearest friend, thinks she died at my birth. But that is a lie. Sometimes a lie is necessary when the truth is too monstrous to be subjected to scrutiny.) It is curious,

that the burden of this catastrophe, so long buried, should return to me now. Was it the sight of that madman walking the streets, preaching his gospel of hellfire and peddling his warped salvation? (A loose application of the word 'gospel', if ever there was one; his message surely the opposite of good news.) Scot-free of how many broken hearts, vitiated lives, lonely deaths and disappointments. Or was it merely the onset of middling age, which – the harbinger of eventual death – causes men to turn to their past, in the same way that Tom Fitzroy has turned to Church and King?

I am well aware, that – unless my mother was of a very unusual cast of mind – I should have been a disappointment to her. My way of life is not calculated to induce approval. Indeed it is not calculated at all – in which rests both its delight and its horror. But who knows what I might not have become had she not been removed from us? – It is not of her death which I speak here. Death takes many in their prime and we are powerless – fathers, sons, physicians alike – to hold back that tide of disease and misadventure which is the defining feature of life. No, it is of that other event I speak – uglier and more nefarious than death.

Elizabeth used to ask me – in those days, long ago, when I was engaged as tutor to her brother (her father's house not 2 or 3 streets distant from the one in which I had lived with my mother and father) – 'Richard, why can you not believe in God?' Her God, of course, was as different from the one who had devastated us as he was from the God of the churches; he was, like herself, gentle and rational, a passionate opponent of injustice, a champion of the poor and of women; an enlightened deity who had laid his thunderbolts and plagues aside. Dear Elizabeth; I used her ill, I suppose. But it was better thus – I have the capacity to corrupt all I touch. I would have made her miserable, in the end.

These gloomy thoughts assailed me as I stood at the harbour wall this afternoon, my greatcoat and cloak drawn around me to shield me from the biting wind; sea and sky hardly distinguishable, being both of a uniform grey. The waves, however, whipped up so that it chilled a man to look at them.

Cptn. Barclay and I pretended to have met for the first time when I boarded the *Christabel* at Dover; to arouse suspicion of collusion now would be to jeopardise, perhaps, the whole enterprize. I knew that it was Barclay's custom to carry the packet of letters himself to the harbour master here, usually under cover of darkness. I therefore upon disembarking repaired to the inn at which I proposed to stay. The courtyard full of rubbish, kitchen scraps thrown out for the dogs, horse dung, two filthy children chasing each other to keep warm, until my head spun. But it is here that most visitors put up, and I must therefore endure it in hopes of coming across him who comes to fetch the letters. I bespoke a room for the night, which the landlord told me I

would have to share, and dined on coarse bread and overripe cheese. The fleas, no doubt, will dine on me tonight. Some consolation for my miserable surroundings was afforded by a bottle of tolerable Bordeaux, which I have drunk, miserably in this corner, by a fire which seems to cast out hardly any heat at all.

63.

Miles said he was too busy to go for a drink with his housemates; he'd got to check his Visa statement and send some emails, and he'd not rung his mum in weeks. He waited till they'd left for the pub, poured himself a coffee and sat at the dining table with the printouts he'd brought home from work; the result of a few discreet enquiries he'd made into document thefts in the London area over the past couple of years. Most of what he'd turned up was irrelevant, but there had been a couple of interesting items. A small stately home near Gillingham had been burgled on the night of 15th February last year, and within a week a collection of letters on loan from a library in Newcastle had disappeared from the Museum of the Nineteenth Century in west London. Miles had managed, on the quiet, to get hold of a list of the documents in question.

The scenario was obvious; he just needed the evidence. Paulin was stealing goods for a range of clients, including Marchmont; collectors who were prepared to pay and didn't mind where the stuff came from. It went on all the time. Of course, Paulin wouldn't be carrying out the burglaries himself; he'd have others who actually did the dirty work. Marchmont had requested old documents, which Paulin stole to order, subsequently delivering them after hours in a black attaché case to the flat above the Blue Teapot. Though what Marchmont wanted with a load of old documents, he hadn't the faintest idea; nothing on the lists had been identified as particularly valuable. He imagined the strident voice of Ms Watson, the barrister who'd made a career – and a pretty penny – out of defending scum like Marchmont: *Sergeant Carter, could you explain precisely your reason for believing Mr Marchmont, a man of impeccable standing in the community, to be implicated in these burglaries?*

But there was no accounting for people's tastes; and the quiet ones were always the shiftiest. He scanned the lists. Both thefts had involved a considerable number of documents, of all types and periods; yet there was nothing which might link them to

Marchmont. He read on, ticking each entry off with a pencil. Fifteen sermons delivered by the Revd. William Turner in answer to the Methodists, March and April 1863. Diary of James Roper, 9th February 1915 to 11th October 1917. Letters written by Lady Helena Wood to her cousin Michael Spencer, 1924. Who read this sort of stuff, anyway? Was that what Julia wanted to do with her life? He couldn't see the attraction in it.

Then, after half an hour, he came across something that made the reading worthwhile: three letters written by Richard Turnbull: 18th November 1810; 1st February 1813; the third undated. Turnbull was the obscure vagrant Julia was so in love with; it was reasonable to assume that Marchmont shared the obsession. That was it, then: a connection.

Problem was, he'd got no proof. Worse than that, he'd got no real evidence at all. It just wasn't enough to go on. And if he wasn't careful, he'd end up in trouble big time. He was lucky Marchmont hadn't realized his visit a couple of months ago was fraudulent; wouldn't put it past him to make a complaint. He really ought to forget the whole thing, draw a line under it and move on, or else hand it over to the local nick and let them look into it. Chances were they wouldn't take it any further; but cons always slipped up sooner or later and something might come of it.

He still loved her, though he tried to tell himself he was over it. Bit of an irony, second fiddle to a dead vagrant. She'd always seemed quite grounded, but it was as if she had two lives, a normal one in the real world, doing what ordinary people did; and a secret one, in her head. Not so different in some ways from some of the cons he'd come across. Dangerous thing, imagination.

If only he could link Paulin to these thefts in some way. Presumably he travelled to the sites of the burglaries beforehand, to suss out security, layout, the location of the items he wanted stolen; but even so, it was unlikely he'd show up on the radar. If he'd gone by public transport, he'd have bought his tickets by cash. Neither of the places had CCTV and there was hardly any forensic at either scene. A couple of footprints at the museum. A partial fingerprint at the stately home; not Paulin's. Nothing. If he'd been able to tie Paulin in, he'd pretty much have had Marchmont in the bag. But short of a miracle that was pretty unlikely. And what if Julia got implicated in the process? Tough. She'd led him on, then rejected him. He wasn't going to protect the beguiling bitch now.

There was one more thing he could do, then he'd drop it, before he landed himself in the shit: he'd go back, see Marchmont again. You never knew; sometimes they just got jumpy and started making mistakes. Some of them really wanted to get caught anyway. He'd rattle the fat rat's cage a bit, see what fell out.

64.

Julia was struggling with Richard Turnbull's Greek script. She now knew all the letters and could read with some fluency; but still it was slow work, made worse by the untidiness of Turnbull's writing. But the fact that he had used the Greek alphabet begged certain questions. Why had he done it? Its effectiveness as a cipher was limited, given that any educated reader of his day would have been able to read it. A disguise of sorts, but a flimsy and transparent one. Ironically, it was more effective as a deterrent in the twenty-first century. It was as if Turnbull had wanted to put off only the casual observer, at the same time allowing the entries to be read with moderate ease; as if he had wanted to hide and reveal himself at the same time.

Something else made it difficult, too. This was not the handwriting she had come to know so well. It was as if this text had been written by a different man, as if Richard had turned away from her. She imagined him looking sidelong at her, smiling sardonically, the skin crinkling round his brown eyes. She'd been cold-shouldered. It was as if there was always something just on the periphery of her vision; almost as if he were toying with her. If you looked at him full-on you didn't see the whole picture. She carried on reading.

> At five o'clock, I took myself out to the harbour once more and stood alone in the wind and the drizzling rain, watching the ships which swayed at anchor. It looked as if a storm were about to get up: even within the harbour, the waves were high. There were none about but a few sailors and fishermen; no one to arouse either my interest or my suspicion – though I knew I must remain alert; for those whose appearance is least likely to arouse suspicion are often those who most deserve it. I skimmed a few stones across the waves, to counter the numb cold which ran through my body. A strange phenomenon, the wave; for, although it travels from one place to another, the medium through which it travels remains in the same place, being merely agitated up and down. I was reminded then of the lecture I attended some eight or nine years since

with an acquaintance of mine, whose name I no longer remember (he was in possession of a pretty wife and a hideous mother-in-law), at which Doctor Young at the Royal Society explained the experiment which led him to take up the undulatory system of light.

The *Christabel*, leaving Dover on 20th October, 1812, sailed upon the waves and arrived in Calais six hours later; unseen inside her the letters which Cptn. Barclay was to deposit with the harbour-master. The packet of letters, displaced from one locus to another, travelled in the manner of Newton's light – a corpuscle hidden in the captain's strong-box. (My own letter likewise, hidden in my greatcoat pocket.)

Why do such things enter my head? I swear I know not, unless it was that I had been thinking of Mr Bellas again, my old friend and employer, in whose house I spent so many happy days. He was a great admirer of Young, and – though we followed with some difficulty his accounts in the Royal Society transactions – we replicated both his experiment of 1803 and his later one, in which he passed a beam of light through two slits and observed the patterns of interference thus created.

The crossing had been rough and I had been sea-sick. I caught Barclay glancing slyly at me while I was leaning over the side discharging into the grey-green water the hastily-eaten breakfast I had taken at the Dover inn; later, when he asked me how I was faring, more than a hint of amusement turned up the corners of his mouth. A man of few words, Barclay, but none the less expressive for that. He invited me below, to his cabin, and would have had me share his dinner; my stomach, however, obliged me to decline his offer. He poured me instead a glass of rum, which I downed while he stuffed himself with salt beef and cabbage with as much calm, as if he had been sitting in his parlour on dry land and not tossed this way and that in his tiny vessel.

'These are rough seas,' I said, when the rum had started to work on my inside. 'Aye, but not so unusual,' was his reply. 'A brutal mistress, the sea. As like to swallow you alive as to deliver you whole on the other side.' I took another swig and said, 'I have done this journey many a time; yet I am never easy with it. Upon the sea I feel closer to death than anywhere else.' – To which Captain Barclay, picking bits of cabbage from his beard, observed, 'It is my fervent wish, that I might die at sea. And be buried there too. It is on the sea, or in her, that I belong.' I asked him, had he no fear of crossing the Channel with Buonaparte's Navy all around? He replied, that since he had been running these errands for the Frenchman, he had had safe passage into the French ports. 'Not that that would prevent some over-enthusiastic French captain from taking a few shots at us; but we could give them a good run for their money – she's fast, the old *Christabel*. And her crew all ex-Navy men.'

I could wish that my life were as clear-cut and as unambiguous as the captain's, as undisturbed by the need for duplicity. What Barclay appears, he is. In this affair into which he has strayed, in much the same way that his ship might stray into hostile waters, there is for him right and wrong, good and evil; and these are as plainly distinguished as pugilists in the ring. So he plies his cutter in good faith, as steadfast as when he was an excise-man. Whereas I – what do I know of right and wrong, of good and evil? Too much, perhaps. It seems to me that they inhabit all men, sometimes the one and sometimes the other uppermost. And it is difficult at times to fathom, whether our actions spring from one or from the other – actions which, once initiated, ofttimes proceed upon a course over which we have little control.

Who was that Richard Turnbull who first crossed the Channel to France in 1793? Fearless and confident, desirous only to assuage a craving for the most intense experiences of life – the thrill of running close to the wind, of escaping death by a whisker. What relation does that man bear to the Richard Turnbull who lately stood by the harbour wall at Calais? The same body, the same mind; but changed, both of them irrevocably, not only by age but by the mire of experience. Had I known that the decisions taken by that young man would bring me to that juncture in my life, standing looking out at the heaving greasy waves, would I still have taken them? Then, I was sure that the course I was embarked upon would bring about a greater good, but down the years that initial impetus has faded like the lamps of an inn as one walks away from it at dusk; and I have to say that I hardly recognise it. What I do now, I do in part – though not entirely – from habit; and what conviction remains to me is adulterated.

The sea tossed and a cold rain began to fall, and it seemed as if my life reduced itself to the almost invisible margin between sea and sky, between water and air; an illusory boundary that can never be reached, a trick of vision. Who am I? I am Richard Turnbull, who twenty years ago with his friends in the Exeter Tavern ran the risk of apprehension by shouting, 'No King!' and reading aloud from *The Rights of Man*; but who is now an agent of His Fat Britannic Majesty's government. – But so could Mr Kemble answer: I am John Philip Kemble, currently Cato; but last season I was Macbeth, and next I shall be someone else entirely. It occurs to me that our work is similar, differing only in its end; his to please and to instruct; mine to – what? to serve or to scourge*?* – to satisfy within me a spurious desire for justice which eats me like a cancer and which can never be fulfilled.

Like Mr Kemble, I have played a variety of rôles in my life, never satisfied with only one. All my life I have refused to bind myself to one philosophy or another, so as to be free of constraint. I have lived a life of wandering and displacement – for I ever hated fixity. I am unalterable only in my alterity, constant only in my fickleness; like

the motley sea, which varies continually in colour and in temperament, which hides beneath its surface a profusion of phantastic, predatory creatures and a debris of rotting bodies, bones and wreckage.

But it has come to this after all. Though, unlike my friend Tory Tom, I have as yet no paunch, and can run as fast as any man down a dark alley (and may yet need to), I now act in support of the English government, to prevent invasion of one pox-ridden country by a tyrant at the head of another. – I who once hoped the French army would invade and liberate England. How the lights have faded, the bright hopes of freedom and equality died away! Government is a machine in which upright men are largely outnumbered by corrupt ones; a machine which, once embarked upon its course, can rarely and not without dreadful cost be deflected; it bears all before it and crushes any who get in its way. The Terror ended in France with the death of Maximilien Robespierre, but a Terror of sorts I found in England upon my return, with honest men brutally punished for standing against injustice. Of my London friends of ’92, one was later hanged and three transported. Roberts and Higgs died on the ship to New South Wales; I know not what became of Brown. My escape from Paris in 1794 was a close-run thing – and had our endeavour been detected, we would surely have gone to the guillotine – but it may be that, had I remained in England, I too would have dangled at the end of a rope. Between the gallows and the guillotine I thought to forge, not just my own destiny but that of a civilization. In this oscillation I was, depending on my location, too radical or not radical enough. Aspirations come to nought, like the pendulum which slows to a standstill.

Burke envisaged the revolution in France as a wave of evil spreading out from the heart of Europe to its circumference, as when a pebble is dropped in a pond. But the pond of Europe was already full of chopping waves of its own. I have seen on my journeys throughout free England evil and injustice enough for ten lifetimes. It is against such injustice that revolution arises; without one, the other would not be.

God knows what makes me think of all this now, secluded in this rickety hotel. The consciousness of lost youth, perhaps; my aching limbs in this draughty parlour; the pensiveness that accompanies the determined drinking of too much wine.

Shortly after dusk, I saw Barclay climb down from the *Christabel* into a small boat and rowed to shore by his mate. He had with him the box of papers, which he held on his knee. I watched from a distance as he proceeded to the harbour master’s office; after about ten minutes, he came out again and walked up towards the sailors’ tavern. We had agreed there would be no contact between us on shore; it was for that reason

that I had lodged at the Bouteille d'Or. He played his part well, not looking out for me, although he knew I would be there.

26th October

I learnt nothing in Calais. The package was collected an hour later by a young man who also endured the rigours of the Bouteille for a night and who rode the next day in the diligence to Paris. That morning, before taking my own seat in the coach, I went out early and threw my mother's golden locket into the sea. It does not do to cling to the remnants of a dead past. I had wanted only to retrieve it from the fiend; it belonged there, amongst the debris and the wreckage of the ocean. All I touch, it seems, turns to ruin. But, if it was Richard Turnbull who turned toward the waves and hurled his long-dead mother's locket as far as he could throw it, it was the French merchant Antoine Darblay who, in the early morning sunshine, turned his face towards the town.

I rode opposite the young man who had secreted somewhere about his person or in his baggage the letters brought over on the *Christabel*, observing him closely for the six hours of the journey, and again the next day as he went about his business here. An easy task, but this city a place of torment to me.

31st October

Upon my return to England, I slept a night and a day at the Dover inn. – I had not slept the past three nights. Paris itself had sickened me. I had not walked its streets since those days of '93 and '94 when it seemed that anything was possible – that the apocalypse was round the corner if only men would strive enough to bring it about. And strive we did – but then it seemed another apocalypse had arrived; that of a dark and vengeful deity. If we could have overthrown the tyrants, in that hot summer when we had the opportunity – but it slipped from our fingers, the grasp of a dying woman. We had thought to create a new species of humankind, but what is Paris now? A place of wantonness and profligacy. Another tyrant's capital – and tyrants, as everybody knows, cling mercilessly to power like the hawk to its prey.

I had, moreover, discovered in those five days in that much-changed city that which made my heart sick.

When I woke, I called for a bottle and a snack of bread and cheese, after which I rode to London by the light of the moon. From my head-quarters in Litchfield-street, I sent word to Mr B— to send an officer to question Mrs Haspinall, the Landlady at number 10, High-street concerning the movements of her tenant over the past few

months, and to establish if there had been any regularity therein. Martin has reported no comings to the house except the usual; but I knew, sick in the stomach, that that would be the case.

65.

The trial of Henri Jacques de Saint-Gilles, for High Treason
30th January 1813
XVI.

Richard Turnbull cross-examined by Mr Ratcliffe.

Mr Ratcliffe:	Mr Turnbull, you say that you were singled out by Lord Alexander to undertake this commission, is that not so?
Richard Turnbull:	It is.
Mr Ratcliffe:	Yet you had not long been known to him?
Richard Turnbull:	That is so.
Mr Ratcliffe:	You have told Mr Solicitor-general your version of those events. I would like to suggest that you had more than a passive rôle in your being chosen to hunt down this spy. What say you to that?
Richard Turnbull:	It is as I said; I was chosen because I knew Mr Bellas.
Mr Ratcliffe:	Who was unaware of your revolutionary leanings and your insalubrious habits.
Richard Turnbull:	Of my opinions both past and present he was aware, as we discussed them on many an occasion. Mr Bellas is a gentleman of liberal ideas, who found neither my beliefs revolutionary nor my habits insalubrious.
Mr Ratcliffe:	You had, in that case, laid both aside in order to ingratiate yourself.
Richard Turnbull:	That is not so.
Mr Ratcliffe:	Had you not been associated with men who were condemned for seditious words in Turner’s coffee house – and heaven knows what other coffee-houses besides? – I name but three: Philip Jellous, Matthew Harker and Nicholas Sinclair.

Richard Turnbull: That is true. But a man may be associated with others without sharing their ideals. Or their crimes.

Mr Ratcliffe: It has come to light, also, Mr Turnbull, that the prisoner, Monsieur de Saint-Gilles, was accused of sedition in Mr Turner's coffee house about a year before he was arrested on suspicion of spying. (I am surprised that Turner's continues in existence, such a hot-bed of subversion does it seem to be.) It was alleged that Mons. de Saint-Gilles was heard to toast the French Republic. What say you to that?

Richard Turnbull: He was accused, it is true.

Mr Ratcliffe: And tried?

Richard Turnbull: Again, that is true.

Mr Ratcliffe: But not convicted?

Richard Turnbull: No.

Mr Ratcliffe: Could you explain, Mr Turnbull, on whose evidence he was acquitted of that charge?

Richard Turnbull: In fact, upon mine.

Mr Ratcliffe: You were with him in the coffee house that night?

Richard Turnbull: Yes. We often used to drink together at Turner's. There were toasts to the French Republic on that occasion, but not from the prisoner.

Mr Ratcliffe: And how much had you drunk on the night in question?

Richard Turnbull: A bowl of punch with some other gentlemen. A few glasses of claret.

Mr Ratcliffe: Enough to confound the memory, perhaps?

Richard Turnbull: Not so. It takes more than a bowl of punch and a few glasses of claret to confound my memory.

Mr Ratcliffe: Let us move on to your relationship with Mons. de Saint-Gilles. You have admitted to being his friend before his arrest.

Richard Turnbull: That is so.

Mr Ratcliffe: I ask you, then, Mr Turnbull, why it was that you defended your friend when he was accused of sedition; yet, now he is accused of spying, you are his main accuser.

Richard Turnbull: For the simple fact that he was innocent of the one and guilty of the other.

Mr Ratcliffe: A neat little summary and highly commendable. But I put it to you, sir, that you were either this man's friend or you were not. I put it to you that in fact you were not his friend at all and that you merely used him to further your own wicked ends. I put it to you, that, far from needing to discover the identity of the French spy, you knew all along who he was, because precisely you were he. That you were content to defend this innocent émigré in 1811 because he might be useful to you later; no suspicion was then attached to you and you were therefore secure in your position. But that at the later date – under the somewhat uncomfortable pressure of having been employed to catch yourself! – you needed a scapegoat and decided to sacrifice your friend as a pawn in your own dirty game. What say you to that, sir?

Richard Turnbull: I say that it is a complete fabrication, without evidence and unsubstantiated. Had I been employed to catch myself, as you put it, I could have hidden indefinitely in that guise. I say, that if I could by any means have prevented the necessity of making accusation against the prisoner, I should have done so. Mons. de Saint-Gilles was my friend, and I would have remained loyal if I could.

Mr Ratcliffe: Perhaps it was not Mons. de Saint-Gilles who was toasting the French Republic, sir, on the night of 2nd October 1811, but you? You have a reputation, do you not, for radical views? You are a sympathiser of that vile revolution and a friend of the Sans-Culotte?

Richard Turnbull: I will admit to having had sympathy for the Revolution. It seemed to hold the answer to the injustices of what passes for civilization. But later, as many here and in France, I modified my views. A tyranny is nonetheless a tyranny, whether it comes from King or Commoner, aristocracy or Committee of Public Safety.

Mr Ratcliffe: High sentiments, Mr Turnbull. Yet I would bid you beware of throwing together the concepts of King and tyranny today, lest you find yourself in the dock tomorrow. And I ask the gentlemen of the jury to note that we have here a

witness who cannot desist from expressing his radical views even in this court of law.

Richard Turnbull: I beg your pardon, sir.

Mr Ratcliffe: And you are also a man whose way of life is out of the ordinary, is that not so? Do you so much as have an occupation?

Richard Turnbull: I have had many occupations: I have been a librarian, a secretary, a tutor; I have been a companion to a rich and lonely aristocrat. I have tilled the fields and mended roofs, assisted friends who are shoemakers, hairdressers and printers.

Mr Ratcliffe: And which of these is your true occupation, Mr Turnbull?

Richard Turnbull: None of them, if truth be told.

Mr Ratcliffe: None of them. You have no true occupation, is that not so? You live off the goodwill of others; you have no place of residence. You wander about the country as a means of avoiding proper employment.

Richard Turnbull: I had not thought that to be a crime.

Mr Ratcliffe: But you admit it to be so?

Richard Turnbull: I admit that I have no fixed employment. I admit my way of life is out of the ordinary. Yet, if I live off the goodwill of others, I do so with permission. I do not take what is not mine. I am at a loss to understand that that makes of me a criminal and a traitor.

Mr Ratcliffe: It may not make you a criminal and a traitor, as you say, but it gives leisure for those propensities to be nurtured; those nefarious propensities of revolution and Jacobinism. Can you claim that you do not still harbour views to overthrow the present system of government? You were a member of the London Corresponding Society, were you not?

Richard Turnbull: That is true; yet it was many years ago.

Mr Ratcliffe: And you have associated with known radicals and Republicans: Thomas Hardy, William Godwin, Thomas Spence.

Richard Turnbull: I have.

Mr Ratcliffe: So you have a very great propensity to become a traitor?

Richard Turnbull: Every man has a propensity to become a traitor.

Mr Ratcliffe: That is not an answer to my question. I put it to you that this propensity merely obtrudes a little in those subversive activities we have touched upon, and that your true wish is for the overthrow of our most sovereign King, his Majesty George III.

Richard Turnbull: I wish only for the overthrow of injustice. For men to live without the fear of poverty and oppression.

Mr Ratcliffe: Mr Turnbull, you are either a loyal subject or a traitor. There is no middle ground. Which is it?

Richard Turnbull: I am a loyal subject. I believe in reform, not revolution or bloodshed.

Mr Ratcliffe: How very convenient. And espionage, of course, is conveniently free of bloodshed and, having the advantage of secrecy, can be carried out under cover of darkness without bringing attention to yourself. One thing by day, quite another by night. I put it to you, Mr Turnbull, that you are a man of doubtful identity, and that your poor erstwhile friend, Mons. de Saint-Gilles, is the victim of your duplicity.

Richard Turnbull That is not true.

66.

It was gone six-thirty when Julia left the Academy on Thursday evening. She'd had a difficult day, and always at the end of her working week there were things she had to tie up for the next one: marking to finish, lessons to prepare, admin to be done. Detailed records of each student's progress which had to be recorded first on paper, then entered onto a database. That alone had taken her two hours.

She needed real coffee, but while she was walking to a café two streets away the thought of Peter Marchmont crossed her mind; a simmering anxiety which had to do with the notebook he had given her. She brushed it aside, ordered a large cappuccino and sat by the window watching the rain pelt down the glass. Forty minutes later she left, refreshed. When she switched on her phone on her way to Lambeth north tube station, she saw that she had three missed calls and a text message. All from Mathias Fournier.

‘Salut Julia; ring me. Interesting news.’ She noticed with amusement that the message was faultlessly spelt and punctuated; a man after her own heart. She rang him back.

‘Julia, I’ve been trying to reach you all day.’

‘I was teaching this morning and had a three-hour meeting this afternoon. I’ve lost the will to live. Just listen to this: we’ve been given a directive that we’re not to call our students students any more.’

‘So what do you call them?’

‘Learners, apparently. And it’s not just a stupid management fad; it’ll cost thousands of pounds to change all the documentation. Then next year they’ll probably decide on some other new-speak and have to change it all again. In the meantime courses and jobs are being axed left, right and centre. Either the world’s gone mad or I have.’

‘What do you expect?’

‘Well, I’m probably being very naïve, but I expect managers who get paid forty thousand a year and more to come up with real improvements, not lay down the law about vocabulary. Sorry, I’m grumbling.’

‘You’re quite fearsome when you grumble. But I’ve some news which might console you; and my ingenuity will take your breath away.’

‘What have you done now?’ The rain came on again, and she sheltered in the doorway of an antiques shop, next to an old woman with five carrier bags.

‘I’ve moved heaven and earth to get hold of a few letters. Five, to be precise. Written to Henri de Saint-Gilles in 1794.’

‘What? I don’t believe it. Who wrote them?’

‘Don’t worry, love, there’s plenty more fish in the sea,’ said the old woman next to her.

‘I just keep my eyes open,’ Fournier was saying. ‘It’s not clear who wrote them, but they all seem to have been written by the same person. One is signed “John”; the others are just initialled. But I thought they might be useful.’

‘Where are they, these letters?’

‘I’ve got copies of them sitting on my dining table right now. The originals are in the archives at the Bertillon, but I persuaded the librarian that I just had to have them copied.’

‘That old battleaxe? She must have told me three times that it was forbidden to copy any of their documents. How do you do it?’

‘I suppose my position helps. But mainly through a good deal of charm.’

‘Undoubtedly.’

‘You’re such a cynic, Julia. But if you give me your address I’ll send them to you.’

‘I’ll text it you. How can I ever repay you?’

‘I’m sure I can think of something. Or are you being sarcastic again?’

‘No, I’m serious; I really am grateful. You’ve given me so much help. What’s that music in the background?’

‘It’s the ‘Abîme des Oiseaux’ from Messiaen’s *Quatuor pour la fin du temps.* Do you know it?’

‘No.’

‘It was first performed in a German Stalag; Messiaen wrote it while he was a prisoner of war. 1941, I think. The Germans provided a decrepit piano and a cello, but it had only three strings.’

Two hours later, Julia spread out on her desk the old black journal and started a fresh page in her notebook. The next section of Richard Turnbull’s Greek text was even more untidily-written; the letters were bunched together and there were many crossings-out.

> Who can tell, when the path bifurcates before him, which fork to take? Even with hindsight it is a difficult matter. Indeed it is often necessary, it seems, to take both paths, a decision for one or the other being an irksome limitation.
>
> Was it for that, then – to walk both paths, as it were – that within a week of my meeting with Silas W— in Lascells Court, I immediately set off on a course which was diametrically opposite to the first? That first meeting was quickly succeeded by another, of my own instigation, with a man both like and unlike the other. Was it because I could not live within a single rôle and must play two simultaneously – as some actors can take more than one part in a play, providing both do not appear on stage at the same time – that I sought him out? I am still at a loss to explain this decision – unless it was perhaps something at which W— hinted as we stood that fresh sunny morning amongst the growing crowds – I with the shyness of a new lover, giddy with lack of sleep and elated at the prospect before me. Or was the idea entirely

mine? It matters little, now, though it set the course of my life. A dangerous thing to embark upon – which, had it been found out by either side, would have left me friendless and without defence, a prey to the wrath of both, dangling at the end of a rope, maybe. Yet it seemed natural enough at the time.

Samuel Roberts and Silas Wylde: like two parallel lines across the same ground. They performed the same tasks, in much the same way, but for opposite ends and never, never, were those lines to meet. Yet I circled both in a complex, intricate orbit.

— Thus, when I was recalled to Manchester by the urgent news of my father's illness, I had lived in sixteen months more than some men live in a lifetime.

Mr Hanbury did not accompany me to the coach, though he provided me with a little money for the journey. Our relations had been soured by our disagreement over what I deemed his tyranny over his men. – I had on more than one occasion compared the punishing routine of the manufactory to the machinery of state, and he in his turn called me a young hothead who would soon land in serious trouble. Yet Mrs H. was genuinely fond of me and distressed at the news of my father. As I bade her farewell, she gave me a bundle of food in which I later found, amongst the white bread rolls and cold beef, a guinea wrapped in a twist of paper.

But, though I thus had money to spare, I left the coach at Birmingham and continued my journey on foot. I needed to clear my mind, to reflect on the experiences of the past year. It has always been thus with me; the tohu-bohu of the city is that of my own mind, empty and formless until its thoughts have been straightened and ordered by the light of contemplation – and that I can achieve only when I am walking the lanes and paths of this land which is so dear to me; far from street and alley, structures of brick and stone. It is as if the faultless asymmetry of a hawthorn tree at the centre of a field, or the blurred outline of a hilltop under dripping clouds, exert a power in my mind, shedding light on its confusion and bringing it to order; as if the rhythmic tread of walking, one step after another, mile upon mile, focuses disparate thoughts into a coherent ray.

Few of our actions are without consequence, however; and thus it was that, when I arrived at our cottage, my father had sunk into such a state of infirmity that he hardly recognised me. He had one or two periods of lucidity, during which he urged me to find a suitable employment for my life, to serve others, never to forget the principles of equality and justice to which he had brought me up – but for the most part he sank deeper and deeper into nothingness. He slipped quietly from life one warm evening in October, and was buried with the Unitarian rites some days later, those being the closest acceptable to his own views.

With both mother and father now dead, I felt myself cast loose, a bark sailless upon the sea. Yet this was a not unpleasant sensation. At all times I have most feared to be tied down to a particular course or action; the opposite – a complete and utter liberty – has always exhilarated me.

My father's death affected me strangely. Though I had loved him dearly, his loss I felt but little. We had been used to each other's company, having lived quietly side-by-side for three or four years; yet he had withdrawn so much into himself after the death of my mother that I was able to perceive little of the man inside, around whom he had erected a wall, beyond which no other might go. Yet, though the blow of his death was softened by our mutual independence, it brought with it an abrupt return of grief for her we had lost five years before. Though I had never ceased to think of my mother, I had pushed into a dark place of my mind the circumstances which surrounded her death; yet they surged up once more in memory when I looked on the body of my poor father. I felt again the choking heat of that room, the cold air which cracked through my lungs when he flung open the window with the hoarse words – It will not touch her now. I remembered later standing in our small garden, staring bewildered at the knuckles of my left hand which I had dashed repeatedly against the wall, till the skin was torn to shreds and the blood ran down and stained the sleeve of my shirt – yet I felt not the slightest pain. The evening of my father's funeral I sat by the fire in our little study, as we had been used to do at the end of the day and, resting my head on my hand, shed hot tears, till my eyes were sore and my cheeks drenched. But, though I mourned in part for him who had been my companion in those years, it was her face which rose in imagination. A face travestied by the marks of ill-treatment and disease, like a sketch partially rubbed out, on which grotesque and monstrous features have been crayoned in; but beneath that, I fancied I perceived some trace of the indulgent smile which used to look down on me during our walks in Saint Peter's fields – I holding out in my mud-smeared hands captive black-winged beetles or fat earth-worms for her admiration.

She followed me that night from one broken dream to another. Rising before dawn, I tossed off my nightshirt, dressed without care and set out to walk. I had no destination, nor wanted one; let my legs take me where they would. Day after day I walked, sometimes not returning home at night but sleeping in the fields or occasionally with a farmer or handloom-weaver of my acquaintance. At the end of a fortnight, I knew what I would do. Far from settling to an occupation and a life of middling luxury, as my father had wished, I would embark on a different course entirely. Although I admit it not to have been my first motive, it appeared to me nonetheless reprehensible to continue to live in comfort; how could I justify even one servant and a house of two bed-rooms, a fine little study with a hundred-odd books,

when not half a mile from me were families who went to bed with bellies aching from hunger and who had not leisure to look at a book from one month to the next, even if they had learnt to read?

In one of my impassioned conversations with Mr Hanbury, I had said it was a sacrilege that aristocracy and gentry should have money and land in excess while so many went without; they ought, I argued, to be forced to give up what they did not need to live on. To this idea of redistribution – a word he uttered with much scorn, as he might utter the word 'vagabond' or 'traitor' – Mr Hanbury said, that he might begin to believe in my sincerity if he saw me prepared to give up my own excesses. These were far fewer, I replied, than those of many – a love of books and a penchant for embroidered waistcoats – but he said that was of no matter; if I was unprepared to live as I spoke, I was no better than a hypocrite. Of course, he had no desire to see me relinquish what he believed was mine, but rather to shake me out of ideas which to him were not only unpalatable but nonsensical. I, however, saw the logic of his argument and thus determined to keep only such things as I could carry about with me – a few books, my father's watch, my fiddle and flageolet. The rest I would dispose of.

I understood, moreover, without having to think about it, that a wandering life – that life of vagabondage which was my natural state – would facilitate that other into which I had so effortlessly slid.

I had no fixed plan. I neither wanted nor needed one; a life is not like a building or a piece of furniture, made for a purpose known in advance. It is foolish to impose a structure on something, the nature of which is unknown. So, when I stepped out of my father's house for the last time, on a bright morning of November 1792, it was the very shapelessness of what lay ahead which cheered and delighted me.

A line was drawn under this account; there followed a short paragraph, written in pencil, which seemed to have no connection to it:

Sophie

In French it is called le coup de foudre, the thunderbolt. A javelin of lightning which cleaves the mind in two. Poles negative and positive, the crackling spark of electricity. The juxta-position of opposites. Painful joy and comforting bewilderment.
An explosion, as of dry powder, without warning and without control.

In both English and in French, we fall in love; tumble, helplessly startled, as in a dream.

67.

Peter set down his glass on the green leather of his desk and put his hands over his ears. That knocking again. Fit to wake the dead. It couldn't be Paulin; he knew not to call at the flat any more. It had to be that detective. What should he do? He could lock up the study, go down and answer the door; but then he'd have to deal with another barrage of questions. The sergeant might ask to look in the attic. But surely he didn't have a right to do that – not unless he had a warrant? But what if he'd got one, this time? In any case, Peter knew that if he refused it would look suspicious. Then the sergeant would know, instead of just guessing.

But what if he knew already? What if Drue had been careless and somehow let slip about their arrangement? He wouldn't incriminate himself like that, surely? Or what if the sergeant had been watching the flat all the time, for months and months, and seen Drue coming and going? Drue might have been arrested. He might have spilled the beans.

Get a grip. He took some deep breaths, snuffed out the candles and locked up the attic, stepped carefully down the stairs and locked the access door. He regretted now that he'd lied about the attic last time. He could have hidden the documents he'd had from Drue – the only ones the police might be interested in, the only ones he didn't have receipts for – and shown the sergeant up. Shown him there was nothing to see. Henri wouldn't have minded. He'd have understood; it was in his interests anyway.

It didn't really matter what happened to him, Peter, just so long as Henri's name was cleared. How long would it take the girl to read his notebook? A month? Two? What if she failed to read it? No, she'd read it all right. But it was important not to hurry her, otherwise she might get suspicious. Once she was convinced, it would be out of his hands. She'd write it up in her thesis. With any luck it would become the accepted version. The worst-case scenario was that she'd not accept it entirely; but even then, it would become another version of events, a version which had to be taken seriously. There was no way she'd be able to tell it was what she would call a forgery; he was sure of that.

So even if the detective sergeant – what was his name? – Carter – even if he miraculously put two and two together and came up with the truth – which was, Peter had to acknowledge, extremely unlikely – it wouldn't matter. It couldn't be proved.

He could deny all knowledge; he'd picked up the book in a second-hand bookshop; how was he to be held responsible for its contents?

The knocking had stopped. Peter stood in the doorway of his dining room, not daring to move, willing himself not to go to the window and look out. He couldn't afford to give himself away with a twitch of the curtains. Thank God he'd not opened the window, despite the stifling August evening. Let Carter think he was out, or ill in bed. Whatever.

He'd have to get rid of everything. The papers he'd bought from Paulin, the quills, the ink. And the sheet upon sheet of handwriting practice, neatly stacked in the desk drawers. It would be a loss, but it was necessary. Those were the only things that might incriminate him. He'd do it tomorrow.

But he felt they were closing in on him nonetheless. Half an hour later, when he put the kettle on to make himself a cup of cocoa, he noticed his hands were still shaking.

68.

The photocopied letters arrived from Paris five days later, along with a CD of the *Quartet for the End of Time* and a handwritten note scrawled in bright blue ink on a sheet of paper:

> Dear Julia – No idea if these will be of use or not – but the mention of Raoul is surely relevant? I'd have preferred to have shared these with you over a bottle of Burgundy, but tant pis. Faute d'autre chose, I offer you this CD. The three-stringed cello is, I think, a powerful symbol. Keep me informed how your researches are going.
>
> M.F.

There were five letters, all written in the same hand. It wasn't one she recognized. One was a short note in English:

> Your friend begs a loan of as much cash as you are able to spare, as he has eaten only bread for two days and drunk no wine. John.

The others were in tolerable French, one a mere two lines stating that

> Mlle P. has left has left town and will not return before the fifth of next month.
> Your friend, N.

It was possible that these two were encoded in some way, but they meant nothing now. The other three, however, were more interesting.

> Henri,
>
> Beware. I urge you to keep an eye on Raoul; for he bids fair to lose his head as well as his heart, in which case we may all be ruined. Both you and I have a great deal riding on this endeavour – although we each hope to derive a different good from it: I am merely a man of business; you have affairs of state at heart. But you have understood, as he has not, that affairs of state do not thrive without the wholesome assistance of money. God spare us from the impetuous idealist!
>
> The woman he is infatuated with is not to be trusted either. I do not wish to imply treachery – she is as sincere in her ideals as he is – but in that lies the problem. Like him, she will not bend. It is castles in the air or nothing. N.

> I have consignments which leave, one at first light tomorrow and the next two days after that. The carts are old and assistance will be needed in the difficult passage through the City Gates. They leave by the Barrière Sainte-Marie.
>
> Your loyal friend, J.N.

> 22nd Jan., 1794
>
> My dear friend, I write in haste. There are spies everywhere. Antoine is turning out to be a problem. Meet me tomorrow night at the usual place. Do not bring Raoul: I begin to discern a plan by which we might kill two birds with one stone, but his ignorance is an absolute necessity.
>
> J.N.

It was reasonable to assume, thought Julia, as she placed the CD into her laptop, that the letters had been written by John Newman, the American who had been associated with Henri de Saint-Gilles and Richard Turnbull in Paris in 1794, and who, after changing his name to Price, had turned King's Evidence against Saint-Gilles in 1813. But what the letters referred to, she had no idea.

69.

The trial of Henri Jacques de Saint-Gilles, for High Treason

30th January 1813

XVII.

Mr Ratcliffe: We have heard from Mr Price that you, he and the prisoner were in Paris in 1794. Is that true?

Richard Turnbull: It is.

Mr Ratcliffe: Would you care to explain what were you doing in that city at that time?

Richard Turnbull: I had travelled there to observe the progress of the revolution.

Mr Ratcliffe: In 1794? When the whole edifice of civilisation was crashing down about people's heads, you decided to travel to Paris to 'observe the progress of the revolution'?

Richard Turnbull: I did not travel in 1794. I had arrived in Paris the previous year, before the Terror.

Mr Ratcliffe: When exactly?

Richard Turnbull: In March of 1793.

Mr Ratcliffe: And was there no other reason for your going there at that time?

Richard Turnbull: It was largely the desire of a rash young man to see for himself the events that were so talked about.

Mr Ratcliffe: A rash young man with republican sympathies?

Richard Turnbull: I did not say that.

Mr Ratcliffe: Can you say what were your sympathies at the time?

Richard Turnbull: My sympathies were for the victims of injustice and oppression.

Mr Ratcliffe: And you wished to wipe out injustice and oppression by revolution?

Richard Turnbull: No, by reform.

Mr Ratcliffe: And yet we have heard Mr Price tell us that you ran through the streets of Paris shouting *Liberté, Egalité, ou la mort!* Can you deny that? Come now, Mr Turnbull, it is not something you would forget. Did you or did you

not run through the streets of Paris in the year 1794 shouting the words *Liberty, Equality or Death?*

Richard Turnbull: I admit that I did.

Mr Ratcliffe: So. You admit that you did. Yet you have just said that you did not have republican sympathies. Can you reconcile those two facts, Mr Turnbull? For I am sure I find it somewhat difficult to do so.

Richard Turnbull: I was a very young man at the time.

Mr Ratcliffe: Yet it was extreme behaviour, was it not?

Richard Turnbull: It was. But there are many of my age who can look back on such extreme behaviour and say that they have left it behind.

Mr Ratcliffe: And how came you to leave Paris with your life?

Richard Turnbull: I escaped the city.

Mr Ratcliffe: And your friends also?

Richard Turnbull: Yes – although I did not know at the time what had happened to them. We had separated. It was safer thus.

Mr Ratcliffe: And how did you get back to England?

Richard Turnbull: I spent some time in a country district, distant from Paris. Not long after that the Terror came to an end and I returned to London.

Mr Ratcliffe: Let us for a moment consider the circumstances you wish us to believe. You, Mr Turnbull – the very man appointed to expose this spy – not only admit to having known him in Paris at the height of the Revolution, but to having been his friend in London for the past two years. Moreover, you own to a previous acquaintance with the man who has turned King's Evidence against Mr de Saint-Gilles. This smacks to me of conspiracy, Mr Turnbull.

Richard Turnbull: And it might to me also, sir, were I in your position. I can, however, merely state the facts as they are.

Mr Ratcliffe: Can you therefore state the facts of the business you had with Mr Price and the prisoner in Paris at the time of the Terror?

Richard Turnbull: There was no business between us. We were thrown together, that is all.

Mr Ratcliffe: You have told Mr Solicitor-General that you recognised the seals presumed to have been used by the spy, have you not?

Richard Turnbull: I have.

Mr Ratcliffe: And you identified them as belonging to Mons. de Saint-Gilles.

Richard Turnbull: Yes.

Mr Ratcliffe: Could you be so kind in that case as to specify upon which occasions you had seen him use those seals? Surely not in his ordinary correspondence?

Richard Turnbull: I had seen him use them in Paris.

Mr Ratcliffe: Let us be clear upon this point: you had seen the prisoner use these seals in Paris in the year 1794?

Richard Turnbull: Yes.

Mr Ratcliffe: In other words, almost twenty years before you came across them again. Have we not here, Mr Turnbull, much room for error? Your memory may be deemed better than that of Mr Price, your accomplice – it could hardly be worse! – but would it not have to be exceptional to have remembered with accuracy the details of the seals in question?

Richard Turnbull: It is an unusual design; it is not one that could be forgotten.

Mr Ratcliffe: And on what documents had you seen the prisoner use these seals?

Richard Turnbull: I do not know their nature; I merely saw the seals on letters which he sent. I sometimes visited the prisoner at his lodgings and saw the seals upon his writing desk.

Mr Ratcliffe: Yet, if you had no dealings with Mons. de Saint-Gilles which might be construed to be in the nature of business, was it not very careless of him to allow you to see these seals, which we might presume to be for use on secret documents?

Richard Turnbull: It was perhaps careless of him.

Mr Ratcliffe: Mr Turnbull, let us move on. Mr Todd has told us that the prisoner, on his way to Newgate, uttered these words: ‘That villain Turnbull. He ought to have been guillotined

twenty years ago.' Could you explain to us what he might have meant by those words?

Richard Turnbull: I am afraid I can not. It is most likely, that he raved aloud in the coach. It is possible, he meant that, if I had been guillotined twenty years ago – as many innocent men and women were – I should not have been in London to discover his crimes.

70.

Samuel Roberts was a name unknown to Julia, but a few weeks of research among the Home Office Secret Service papers in the National Archives revealed some interesting facts.

In the wake of the French Revolution, the British government ran an extensive surveillance and espionage system to counter the increased threat to national security which resulted from that event. This threat was considered to arise not merely from the activity of French agents in Britain but also from that of home-grown revolutionary sympathizers. For this reason many of the reform societies were the object of keen surveillance.

Samuel Roberts, it turned out, had been a Bow Street runner before being employed by the Secret Office, a branch of the Post Office; his principal task was the opening and resealing of suspect letters so that their contents could be ascertained without the knowledge of their recipients. He was vociferous in calling for stringent measures to be used against those who sympathized with the French Revolution or demanded reform in England. A friend of John Reeves who was instrumental in the creation of the new police system set up in 1792 and who later founded the Association for Preserving Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers, Roberts had in August 1792 been given – perhaps by Reeves himself – the task of recruiting a handful of crack informers. The exact purpose of this small group of men was unclear; some of their duties included an early infiltration of the divisions of the London Corresponding Society, an organization detested by Roberts, but there were hints of a 'greater task', unfortunately unspecified.

It appeared then that Richard Turnbull had, in the space of a week, pledged himself to both radicals and government. Wandering dazed with euphoria after a meeting of the London Corresponding Society in June 1792, he had come upon Silas Wylde in Lascells Court and (it was reasonable to assume) been recruited for the radical cause in some way. Then, by his own admission, he had sought out Samuel Roberts, presumably to engage himself on the side of the government.

Whatever his motive for that action, it seemed that Turnbull had in fact worked on behalf of the British state in the early 1790s. Amongst the hundreds of records she trawled through, Julia found four documents which enabled her to make a provisional sketch of his connection with the government. It started with a letter written by Samuel Roberts to William Wickham, one of the magistrates attached to the Whitechapel Police Office and soon to become the foremost spymaster in Britain:

> Lambeth, 5th September, evening
> Sir – I have found three who promise to be both able and loyal in the Thing, and have instructed them to wait upon you within the week. One of them – a young man who burns with an ardent fire – has already joined that most despickable society the corresponding Society set up by the mad cobbler Hardy, with the aim of informing on it. He had no trouble, he said, passing himself off as a supporter of reform. He used that word, reform, and could not be made to admit they talked of revolution or Revolt; from which I deduce he is as honest as he is naïf. It is strange I know to be speaking of honesty when I have spent these 3 weeks past seeking out men who will be employed in deceit and lies. But I mean he will say exactly as he sees, an invaluable trait in one engaged to investigate this evil society.
>
> I remain at the same address.

Wickham had written to John King, Home Office Under-Secretary, on 11th September:

> One of my officers has found a further three men to assist in the Thing. They have been set to work *pro tempore* in the Corresponding Society. One of the three has already proved his worth by reporting substantial information, and I would take the liberty of recommending him for the French errand you mentioned at our meeting on Thursday last. He has the advantage of being fluent in the French language, as well as in several others, and is both intelligent and educated.

On 15th September 1792 an authorization had been issued for the payment of the three informers:

Matthew Sallis
Richard Turnbull
Nicholas Summerson

Turnbull had been allocated £5 7s 4d, but the signature on the document was illegible. A further payment had been made early the next year, shortly before his voyage to France:

2 Febʸ 1793 To Richard Turnbull, £50.

These documents suggested that Turnbull was playing a double game as early as 1792. But which side was he really on? Turnbull's narratives in his 1812 journal intertwined the events of that year with those of the early 1790s. In the next passage of the journal he made an explicit connection between the two:

> Deeper and deeper into this sordid business. (Yet how may I complain of sordidness, I who have since my youth plunged myself into feculence of one sort or another?)
>
> It is the events of that earlier time, however, which are uppermost in my mind. That there is a connexion, I cannot deny. SG, JP, RT: an unholy and eccentric orbit. Each a different man now from the one he was in Paris; but perhaps in that earlier calamity the seeds of this were sown. Thus it is – because I can rid myself in no other way of these phantasmagorical visions which play upon the surface of my memory – that I must note them here, in this book intended for jottings and memoranda on the business. (The same with those anterior events: Juggins and my mother.)
>
> The dark time. Darkness within darkness. Two rays of light, I understand, may combine to produce darkness; but darkness can never combine with itself to produce its opposite. What light we thought the revolution would bring! Instead it brought a long night of gloom and blood.
>
> Henri said the Terror was the only way to purify the Nation of its filth, in the same way that gold is purified in the crucible; the incorruptible elements which remained would create a new future. Newman, who had escaped incarceration as an alien –

though it was impossible for anyone not to know he was a foreigner; his accent gave him away each time he opened his mouth – was in possession of either a charmed life or of friends who protected him. – Unless he too had a secret rôle of which we were unaware.

But against the dark background one jewel stood out. Sophie and I met when we had opportunity; often at her aunt's house on the Allée des Veuves, in the Champs Elisées, not far from the Chaillot gate, which had been her home since the death of her father in 1788. Her cousin the ex-Chevalier du Breuil, now plain M. Breuil, lived with them, although he had rooms not far from mine in the rue de Varenne, where he spent much of his time. Madame had twice tried to leave Paris, both times without success, and now lived in daily fear of incarceration, of execution, of confiscation of her property. Thus, though she disapproved of her son and her niece having relinquished their aristocratic status, she saw that it was perhaps for the best under the circumstances. But she was a lady of the old school and made plain her disapproval of me from our first meeting, as if she could see through to the plebeian heart beneath my bright blue redingote. As I kissed her hand, the look which sidled down her Roman nose intimated plainly that I was unfit even to sweep shit from her doorstep. But Sophie, standing slightly behind her, pulled a face which cheered me like the sun which, rising above a peak, floods a valley with light.

We met under her aunt's nose at the house in the allée des Veuves; here the air was fresh and we could forget for a while the cauldron of fear and bloodshed which brewed in the city. Sophie had rooms on the second floor, to which I could easily gain access from the servants' quarters, buying their silence by impersonations of their mistress or the occasional, and ever more infrequent, gift of wine or tobacco.

Late one afternoon I woke to find that dusk had fallen while we slept. (If death were like that sleep which follows congress with a woman, would we not all rush headlong to it, instead of fearing and dreading it? But we must always wake from that sleep.) She smiled at me, running her fingers through my hair, but I knew she was troubled. What will become of us, Raoul? she said. It cannot last, this idyll.

— Nothing can last I said, kissing her neck and rolling from the bed. It is the nature of the times, the nature of life. We must take what we can, when we can.

— But have you no thought for the future?

— I once thought to change the future. But it has a will of its own, it would seem.

— Must you go, Raoul? It is unsafe on the streets. All the time now, she said, with a shudder; but especially at night. She held out her arms, but I said, buttoning my shirt, that I must go. I had promised to meet Antoine at the Jacobins that night.

— Do you think he knows about us? she asked, leaning on one elbow.

— Suspects, perhaps. Does that matter?

— If he told my aunt … It was our parents' wish that we should marry. And his too.

— And yours?

— What do you think?

— And would he hold you to that? To a custom of the ancien régime?

— I fear everyone, she said. Even my own cousin. Who knows what a man is capable of? These times have brought out the worst in everyone.

I kissed her and left, running down the back staircase and crossing the garden where I mingled with the dark shadows cast by the trees.

She was right, as she so often was. The times did bring forth the worst in many of us. Everyone suspected everyone, often unjustly. And I — I made the greatest mistake of all.

71.

The trial of Henri Jacques de Saint-Gilles, for High Treason
30th January 1813
XVIII.

Mr Ratcliffe:	You told Mr Solicitor-General that you refused to carry papers of authorisation about you, in case these incriminated you; is that correct?
Richard Turnbull:	It is.
Mr Ratcliffe:	And yet, we have heard Mr Price tell us, that, when you wished to convince him that you were a bona fide Government man, you produced papers which confirmed this.
Richard Turnbull:	That is so. I obtained signed documents from Lord Alexander's office, in order to persuade Mr Price. I had not carried these before, and I returned them once Mr Price had agreed to turn King's Evidence.

Mr Ratcliffe: You have stated also, Mr Turnbull, that you feigned to Mr Price your ability and your willingness to sell secrets to the Americans, is that not so?

Richard Turnbull: It is.

Mr Ratcliffe: How much were you paid by Price for your intelligence?

Richard Turnbull: Thirty guineas on the first occasion and thirty-five on the next. But I did not keep the money.

Mr Ratcliffe: What did you do with it?

Richard Turnbull: It was used as part of the inducement to Price to turn King's Evidence.

Mr Ratcliffe: So he was bought off with his own money?

Richard Turnbull: In part, yes.

Mr Ratcliffe: That is perhaps an apt comment on this sordid business. But there is something more important in this matter. How do we know, Mr Turnbull, that you were not in fact selling secrets to the United States?

Richard Turnbull: Because I had no such information. I pretended I had intelligence to sell to Mr Price, that is all. It was merely a ruse which enabled me to prise myself between Price and the French spy. I was prepared to invent information if I must.

Mr Ratcliffe: You seem, Mr Turnbull, if I may say so, to be as changeable as the camelion. You told Mr Solicitor-General that you revealed yourself to Mr Price 'in your true guise'. I would put it to you, however, that it is a difficult thing – perhaps for you as for us – to determine at any moment your true guise. Are we seeing before us here the real Richard Turnbull, or merely one of his many masks?

Richard Turnbull: And I might say in return, that is in the nature of the task I had been given. A man set to detect another who by his nature is duplicitous must to some extent partake of that same duplicity.

Mr Ratcliffe: You wax philosophical, Mr Turnbull. I wished to point out that a man who is not one man but many may not be as trustworthy as he seems. That the heart of a true Englishman despises duplicity. But let us leave this

subject. Is it not, Mr Turnbull, a somewhat improbable coincidence, that the French spy you had been commissioned to track down should turn out to be none other than the friend with whom you had kept company for the past two years?

Richard Turnbull: It is a coincidence.

Mr Ratcliffe: It is a coincidence. But I am asking you, Mr Turnbull, to consider the improbability of this coincidence. Of all the Frenchmen in London, the spy happens to be your friend. Tell me, yea or nay, is that coincidence not improbable?

Richard Turnbull: It is improbable.

Mr Ratcliffe: It is so improbable as to be without doubt a fiction, is that not so? For whatever reason, you accused your friend of spying. That is the only explanation of this matter. What say you to that?

Richard Turnbull: That its very improbability implies its truth. Had I wished to concoct a false accusation of espionage, I should have chosen more intelligently than my own friend.

Mr Ratcliffe: But if you specifically wished to concoct an accusation against Mr de Saint-Gilles?

Richard Turnbull: I can only deny that. In truth, I would have given much to avert the course which events took in the end.

Mr Ratcliffe: Then let us look at another coincidence, sir; or perhaps look at the same coincidence in a different light. Let us entertain for one moment the fiction that Mons. de Saint-Gilles is a French spy. Is it not a little surprising, that he then happens to lodge, not only in the same village, but as next-door-neighbour to the man who is commissioned to seek him out?

Richard Turnbull: It is. Yet coincidences of that sort do happen.

Mr Ratcliffe: That is indeed true. And when they do, it usually betokens some underlying connexion, is that not so?

Richard Turnbull: In some cases, yes. But I am at a loss to see one here.

Mr Ratcliffe: Yet we have heard, have we not, that you and the prisoner and Mr Price were all known to each other in Paris twenty years ago. Is that not a connexion?

Richard Turnbull: It is true, that we were known to each other. But that is all. It is merely a coincidence that we have been thrown together once again.

Mr Ratcliffe: Mr Turnbull, you have stated that, in your opinion, the letter you took from Ezekiel Juggins's pocket may have referred to a projected uprising, is that not so?

Richard Turnbull: It is.

Mr Ratcliffe: And what was your involvement in the projected uprising?

Richard Turnbull: I knew nothing of it.

Mr Ratcliffe: Insurrection is a serious matter, is it not, Mr Turnbull?

Richard Turnbull: It is.

Mr Ratcliffe: Yet you were not deterred in your hunt for the spy by the imminent possibility of an insurrection in the north of England.

Richard Turnbull: My hunt for the spy was the task for which I had been engaged. I have already explained, that I informed both the magistrate and Lord Alexander of the possibility of an insurrection. I considered that to be the best course of action.

Mr Ratcliffe: We have heard you admit to being a member of the London Corresponding Society. It puzzles me, that a one-time radical – who is, for all we know, still a radical – should turn government man so swiftly.

Richard Turnbull: It was many years ago that I was a member of the Corresponding Society. I deplore and despise the government of Buonaparte, which has prolonged this dreadful war.

Mr Ratcliffe: And how can we be sure that you have the interests of your country at heart, and not some hidden scheme of your own?

Richard Turnbull: You cannot be sure. Yet I have brought a traitor to book.

Mr Ratcliffe: Indeed, we cannot be sure. That is one point upon which I agree with you.

72.

Julia was drafting part of her thesis:

On 4 March 1794, the *Journal de Paris* reported the execution of one Monsieur Antoine Breuil, who had been denounced to the Comité de Surveillance for the Section of the Champs Elysées two days previously for fraud and hoarding. A letter written by M. Breuil had been sent anonymously to one of the members of the Section Committee; this letter linked the ex-Chevalier with the recent East India Company scandal and hinted at reserves of grain held by him at his house in the semi-rural allée des Veuves (now the avenue Montaigne in the west of the city). M. Breuil denied the charges; the letter was, however, considered sufficient to condemn him.

What the *Journal de Paris* did not report was that two nights before Breuil's arrest, three men had sat down in a dingy and sparsely-furnished room in the rue d'Enfer and concocted the letter which would bring him to the guillotine. The identity of those men? Three unknowns in the history books: John Newman, an intermeddling American who many years later, after a change of name, became a senior official in the American diplomatic service. Henri Saint-Gilles, onetime minor French aristocrat who had thrown his weight behind the Revolution and was at this point an enthusiastic supporter of Robespierre and the Terror. And Richard Turnbull, Englishman, the most shadowy of them all: a wandering scholar, definitely; a radical and a Jacobin, possibly. But possibly also a British agent, or a double agent.

We know that these three forged the letter that night because Richard Turnbull owns up to it in his journal, in a passage written in early November, 1812.

3rd Nov.

A chill wind, a grey sky and a dirty street – I no longer remember which, though I will never forget the date: Monday, 2nd February 1794. The rue Jacob, perhaps. Down that street Newman walked towards me, as I towards him; the distance between us decreasing – the distance between life and death, hope and despair, sanity and madness. A messenger come to announce not just disaster, but the annihilation of the stars themselves. The devastating news delivered with a gentleness which belied his usually brash nature. His arm around me when I thought I should stumble and fall.

She has been arrested, he said.

An anonymous denunciation, he later explained. This was not unusual; so many grudges, so many old rivalries and enmities, the resentments of centuries. Such an atmosphere of suspicion.

Where is she? I think I shouted, but my words sounded strange, as if they originated in another's body. The Abbaye, he said.

My only thought was to free her. Yet it was an impossibility – as impossible as blowing back the wind to the place it has come from.

I had often discussed with Henri the justice of arresting on suspicion, of trial by instinct – for that is what the new system had become. Only two possible results: acquittal or execution. No need of evidence; traitors could be smelled out. A swift justice, and a brutal one.

So it was that she who had lain in my arms only days before, the only being except one whom I have ever truly and selflessly loved, passed by me on the rue Saint-Honoré, her final journey to the place de la Révolution. Was I a coward, that I could not stand at the foot of that monstrosity and watch as the foul and unjust deed was carried out? She had begged me the night before not to do so. — Remember me as I was, she said. It was reason enough for an arrest, to be seen to mourn a traitor at her death. A plain white shift in the February morning, her hands tied behind her back; around her shoulders the dark curls that would be hacked off by Sanson before he tied her down. Her eyes sought me out; I held her gaze as long as I could keep pace with the tumbrel, but the press of the crowd soon separated us. That was the last I saw of her.

I wandered the streets then for I know not how long, collapsed at last in the doorway of a shop, ignorant of what part of the city I was in, except that it was one of the poorer quarters. An old man, seeing me weeping in his doorway, half-carried me into the shop. — I was a carpenter, once, he said in a scornful voice. At least then I did a good trade in cheap coffins. Now I have no materials and nothing to sell. And the bodies don't need coffins any more. He prevailed upon me to sit at table with his family, and offered to share what food they had; but the very thought of food disgusted me.

— You are not one of us, said one of the women. What is your business in this part of the city?

— I hardly know. And then, because she seemed to be waiting for a better explanation, I said, Someone died today on the guillotine.

— Many die on the guillotine, said a younger man – the carpenter's son, perhaps – slurping watery soup into his mouth. Day by day, month by month. Can they all have been traitors? That is what I would like to know.

The old man silenced him. They will arrest you, he said, for talk like that.

They prevailed on me to drink some rough wine mixed with water and I left, in the gloomy dusk and biting cold. I could easily have denounced myself to any of the section committees – I would gladly have died then – but one idea had formulated itself in that afternoon's mad wandering, and I had to act on it.

I knew who had denounced her and why.

In the days between the news of her arrest and her execution, I had begged Henri to exert his influence with the Committee in an attempt to free her; but his efforts had come to nothing. He had done all he could, he said, and added, If she was a traitor, she was a traitor. — Have you never loved? I asked him; to which his answer was, Only my country. I asked him, whether he had any idea of who had denounced her; at which he merely gave a strange little smile and refused to say more. That was before I made my last visit to the Abbaye, to bid her for ever farewell.

Would my life have been different had she lived? The ache of her loss will never leave me. But I am not made for a normal life; how could I have supported wife and children, I who must live a life of constant displacement?

On the evening of that dark day I understood this: that it was her cousin Antoine who had denounced her. He had discovered her love for me and, rather than surrender her, sent her to her death.

A week after the execution, Newman remarked – we were sitting in the attic of the house on the rue d'Enfer – we had moved from place to place to avoid detection – that 'M. du Breuil is giving us cause for concern.' The use of the particule startled me, as did something about his tone of voice. Antoine was the only subject which could rouse me from my torpor; I asked N. to explain himself, but he remained silent. Two days later Henri, returning from the Tuileries, sat down next to me in the corner of the dingy room – I had taken to spending whole days sitting by the empty grate – and said, Richard, we need to know if we can rely on you. — We? I asked. — John and I. While you have been moping (he said this as if I were a schoolboy sulking over a lost marble) a certain problem has come to light.

I needed little inducement. The idea was mine. We sat round the rickety table that night – it was the first time I had felt any sort of life within me since that awful day – and planned the letter. It was not difficult; in those days a mere suspicion was a match to gunpowder. How easy, to dispose of a man's life! A machine of state more deadly than a knife after dark. No recriminations, no guilt attached to those who accused. Even had we failed – had he been acquitted by the Tribunal – he would not have known who had made the accusation.

I did not so much as ask Henri or Newman what Antoine had done to deserve their disfavour; I sent him to his death because I believed him responsible for hers. How easy to become what I despised.

Many years later – I have the gift – if gift it be – of being able to parcel up my sorrows; each lies in a strong box deep in the dark back-room of my mind. But many years after this I came upon a poor child – her clothes in rags, her dirty face framed by lank and tangled hair – clutching an orange. Where was this? Lancashire, I think; I was approaching one of the old weaving towns. The girl – bare-legged despite the cold, covered in mud, her pinafore greying with age and dirt – cradled the orange like a treasure; when she saw me approaching she ran towards me, her face radiant. Look, look, she said, holding it out in her hand, caressing its bright, dimpled peel.

Such a feeling then overcame me, that I thought I might fall down by the wayside and weep as I had not wept since that day. This poor child so pathetic, so delighted by the rare gift of an orange – an event she would perhaps remember all her life, as she suckled her own sickly infants and watched them die, weakened by lack of food, taken off by the pox and the measles one by one, or, in the bad years, two or three at a time.

I scooped her up, this unknown child, and clasped her to my breast as if she were my dearest love. When I put her down I gave her a sixpence. It was all I had left in my pocket.

So precious – so fragile – the life which inhabits us.

73.

The last customers left on the dot of seven. The young man who drank black coffee and always dressed in black had brought with him a young woman, with whom he had sat and talked intently for an hour and a half. Stark make-up, hair carelessly piled on top of her head, black-painted finger nails. But a nice girl all the same; she'd smiled at Peter when he took their order to the table. He'd caught snippets of their conversation as he served other customers: evolutionary imperative, the primacy of sex, the Arab Spring.

But they weren't all like that. Two women had come in for morning coffee, trailing three children. Peter would have been hard-pressed to say who had made the most noise; the children had been allowed to shriek and shout and play hide-and-seek between the closely-packed chairs, and the mothers had issued loud but ineffective commands to 'Stop that' or 'Come back here this instant', before returning to their conversation. And to cap the lot, Detective Sergeant Carter had arrived for a late lunch, sitting moodily with a sandwich and a pot of tea. He'd left after half an hour, but his presence had shaken Peter, who'd thought that, because he hadn't been round for several weeks, it had perhaps all blown over. But now he remembered the panic he'd felt standing at the entrance to his dining room the last time the sergeant came to call.

He noticed as he shut up the café that the weather had taken a turn for the worse. Only the end of October and it promised to be a foul night. Along the dark street in which puddles of neon glowed, last summer's desiccated leaves were being driven by a wet wind; swirling as if they had a life of their own, like small mammals. Peter locked the iron security gate; a cold gust blew into the café and chilled him in his shirt sleeves. Quickly, he pushed the café door shut, pulled the bolts across with force and switched on the alarm. The young man in black – he'd never learnt his name – had been sitting with his girlfriend in Henri's corner; as he cleared away their cups and saucers, plates and crumpled napkins, he glanced up at the plaque.

From this seat in November 1812 Henri de Saint-Gilles, a French émigré, was arrested as a spy and taken to Newgate prison where he was later executed.

Well, it could be changed once the truth was out. ‘Unjustly arrested as a spy’. Or an addition could be made: ‘Almost two hundred years later, his innocence was proved.’ Perhaps he ought to be thinking about the wording already.

Around this time of year, as soon as the leaves were falling and the nights drawing in, Peter began to anticipate the ghost’s arrival. Henri always appeared erratically; sometimes he made Peter wait till the anniversary of the arrest itself, but more often than not he came earlier in the month. Once he’d materialized, he’d keep appearing until the end of November.

This year he came early.

The last of the pots stashed in the dishwasher, which was now gurgling, Peter closed up the café kitchen and climbed the stairs to his dining room. He was glad now that he’d not opened the door to Sergeant Carter last time he’d come knocking; he’d been in such a state he might have given anything away. He didn’t feel like eating tonight; he drew the curtains and climbed the stairs to his study, excitement surging in his chest. Not that there was work to be done up here any more; now that he’d finished the notebook and handed it over to Julia, there was nothing he could do but wait. He kept up his handwriting practice, just in case. He hadn’t disposed of his quills and paper; he’d decided the next day that he’d over-reacted. Carter couldn’t possibly have anything on him, so he had no right to come snooping in the attic. And a skill so patiently and painstakingly acquired mustn’t be lost.

He rummaged for a bottle of Bordeaux in the sideboard and when he turned round Henri was there.

‘Well met, again, friend.’ Peter poured his wine. ‘A toast. To the completion of the plan. The restoration of your honour.’

‘Tell me, then,’ said Henri with a smile, ‘what progress you’ve made.’

So Peter explained. It was all but in the bag; he’d finished the notebook, given it to the girl. ‘So all we do now is wait. Then we’ll have them, dear boy. Then we’ll have them.’

‘Excellent,’ said Henri. Then he was silent a few moments. ‘But there’s something else, isn’t there? I can tell there’s something worrying you.’

‘Only you would know that. Yes, in fact there is. I feel I’m being hounded.’ He told Henri, who sat with his hands on his knees and a slight frown on his handsome face, about Detective Sergeant Carter’s visit, the lie he’d told about the attic, the fear

he had of being found out. ‘I feel as if he knows everything about me – not just about the stolen documents, the notebook, but everything.’

‘That is an unreasonable proposition. How can he possibly know what you have kept secret?’

‘He can’t, I suppose. But he frightens me.’

‘Pah! What can he do, a puny officer of the law of this modern age? In my day, there were men to fear, all around: spies, agents, traitors who would knife you in the back for no reason.’

‘That’s all very well for you. I haven’t lived through a revolution. I don’t know what to do.’

‘Get rid of the stolen documents.’

‘How?’

‘How should I know? Give them back, or hide them, or something. Give them to the girl you mentioned.’

‘Then what?’

‘Then the policeman can see the attic.’

‘But I told him there wasn’t one.’

‘You can tell him you lied. That this is your private place and you don’t like other people to intrude in it. You’re a secretive man. That’s not a crime, is it? Even in this intrusive age.’

‘But what if he knows about the notebook?’

‘How can he know about the notebook? Only you and the girl know of its existence. Even if it were shown to be a forgery, who could prove that you were its author? You merely bought it from Bill Sinclair at the bookshop. But if you’ve done as good a job as you say you have, its dubious status will never come to light, n’est-ce pas, mon ami?’

74.

‘Mathias, I need to talk to you.’

‘Mon Dieu, what have I done?’

‘Nothing. What have you got to hide?’

‘Nothing. Is everything all right, Julia? You sound deranged.’

‘I possibly am deranged. I may indeed have lost contact with reality. But you probably mean I sound disturbed. “Deranged” in English means “insane”. However, semantics aside, I’ve got a problem.’

‘What sort of problem?’

‘It has to do with a notebook. I’m unsure what to make of it.’

‘Only you, Julia, could have a problem with a notebook.’

‘Very funny. But it’s serious. I’d really like to discuss it with you.’

The notebook Peter Marchmont had given her was not dissimilar from the one she had acquired at Bank House – a small octavo approximately fifteen by twenty centimetres – although its black leather cover was only slightly scuffed. Its unlined pages were filled with Richard Turnbull’s tight scrawl. But it was both like and unlike the first. She’d read it through twice now, and although she’d told Fournier she was unsure what to make of it, she’d formed an idea which she found worrying if not monstrous. She opened it once more and read.

> And London itself not the same city I had left in haste and disgust in the spring of 1813. I had leisure, while Montagu went about his business at the East India Company, to revisit old scenes, the sites of old passions. But what changes! The wide sweep of the New street, the colonnades of the Quadrant, the grand mansions and shops, staggered me. But I fancied too I heard the cries of those ousted from homes demolished to create these paragons of fashionable elegance. But more insistent, before even I walked down Old Bailey from Ludgate Hill the next day, was the cry of him I had consigned to hell, to die at the end of a rope and to suffer bodily mutilation. Him whose name I sullied for ever. Though I may have covered over the black squalor of my past, in much the same way that Mr Nash’s new street has obliterated the old wooden hovels and dark alleys of Swallow-street, the voices remain. What I did can never be undone.

The journal was unproblematic until about half-way through, though it contained few material facts that Julia was not already aware of. But then there was an autobiographical passage which puzzled her:

> I was born at Manchester on the 9th of May in the year 1774. My father, a man of good standing in that town, had amassed a modest fortune as a Hardware and Toy-man in the Shambles and until my thirteenth year we lived quietly in a comfortable house in Chappel-walks, between the Dissenters' meeting house and the new market hall. My father was often from home on matters of business, but my mother and I found pleasure in each other's company and I number those days amongst the happiest of my life.
>
> In the year 1788, however, a calamity struck our household, from which our little family never recovered. It was my mother's custom to visit the poor of the town – of whom there were many – taking food and other necessaries. She sometimes allowed me to accompany her on these visits; for she said, that though we lived in plenty, there were many who did not, and it was important for me to reflect upon such inequality. Though some held this to be a just state of affairs – even a *sine qua non* of life – she told me, that it was a blight upon the name of England. These visits were the only occasion on which I was unhappy to be in her presence; for if I experienced a deep repugnance at the dark hovels she took me into, how much more terrified was I by their gaunt and often misshapen inhabitants. I had the mind of a child then, and saw, as a child will, goblins and monsters where there were only beings worn down by years of dearth and toil.
>
> It was no doubt on one of these visits, early in the year 1788, that my mother caught the smallpox. She died seven weeks later. My distraught father watched by her bedside, heedless of the risk of contagion. I too paid no heed; it was, in fact, my most fervent wish that, if my mother should be taken from us, I should go with her. But the life which faded so fast in her was stubbornly tenacious in us, and we followed her coffin to the grave on an early March day under a seeping rain. The clergyman spoke of resurrection and eternal life, but I cursed the God who had taken her from us. It is perhaps from that moment that I date my disaffection with – and my hatred of – the Christian religion and all who peddle it. That night I asked my father if he truly believed in the life of the world to come. He smiled sadly and said that he thought this life was all – but that he still hoped in that miraculous resurrection.
>
> His business failed not long after that. He had neglected it during my mother's illness and had not the heart for it afterwards. And it is not to creditors that one looks

> for patience or compassion. A year after her death we left Manchester. He took upon himself to complete my education – he was much reduced in circumstances – and that became, I think, his sole pleasure.
>
> When I reached my seventeenth year, he sent me to London, to work in the manufactory of a friend of his. Mr Hanbury was a tall man of sixty, his white hair carelessly brushed back from his face; he treated me with kindness, although I had difficulty in submitting to the arduous routine which obtained in household and manufactory alike.

Julia shivered. A grey drizzle was trickling down the window, somehow comforting in its flat drabness. She pulled on a large cotton jumper over her pyjamas and made coffee, which she drank sitting absent-mindedly on her sofa. Was there really a problem with Peter Marchmont's notebook, or was she simply reluctant to accept its affirmation of Turnbull's guilt? Yet the passage she had just read gave a different version of Anna Turnbull's death from the one she had read in the Bank House journal. She took down a notebook from one of the shelves above her desk and riffled through its pages, looking for the notes she'd taken from that other account. Her handwriting was getting worse. Her own notebooks, expensive A4 hardbacks, had begun to resemble Turnbull's own, with their handwritten notes scrawled and scribbled, their marginalia and underlinings. She was building up a simulacrum of Richard Turnbull's writings. Here it was. She reread what was, in fact, an unforgettable account.

Turnbull's autobiography was nothing more than a vast, amorphous collection of scattered fragments created over many years; it would be surprising, therefore, if he had not written different versions of his past. The problem was that the two accounts of his mother's death were factually contradictory; they couldn't both be true, and the discrepancy could hardly be the result of a lapse of memory. A deliberate fiction, perhaps? But to what purpose? Turnbull had by his own account told his friends that his mother had died giving birth to him; because, he said, the truth was too monstrous to tell. That would hardly apply to death from smallpox in 1788, which was a common occurrence. Moreover, Marchmont's journal contained no mention of Ezekiel Juggins; a fact which was surely significant.

It was a big coincidence that Marchmont should have turned up the very evidence he so longed to find. He'd told her, way back in February last year, at their first

meeting, that Turnbull was a spy; he'd been certain of that fact without evidence, and now evidence had come to light to prove it. But the explanation which had crossed her mind was so fantastic that it didn't bear thinking about. It was, however, a theory backed up by three tiny bits of evidence which she'd found as she combed through Marchmont's notebook. The first was in an entry that Turnbull had written about a recent trip to Dover.

Dover, October 1829

This evening I stood upon the cliffs and gazed out at the sea. The sea! That great, glassy, blue-green, foam-flecked turbulence which surrounds our island. It is a moving sight. But as I stood and looked, I remembered an evening over fifteen years ago on which I found myself in exactly the same place, standing and looking out over the sea. It was the summer of 1812, and I was not merely idling my way around the country, as some believed, but had engaged myself upon that matter of state which was to have such a devastating effect on my life. In the afternoon I had watched the soldiers at their manoeuvres. The cavalry, a thousand it seemed, though in number they can have been no more than a couple of hundred, whirling their exercises upon the plain, their coats a blur of red, swords at their sides; rising and falling in their saddles as one. Then they turned and galloped, swords drawn, under the commands of their officer.

Such a majestic sight it was, that I half wished I had been a soldier myself, to have been part of such a swirling mass, as regular and as ordered as a dance. To go and fight – openly and honestly – for my country in her hour of need. Camaraderie and the uncomplicated matter of following orders; knowing the next man is to be trusted because his life depends on yours as yours on his.

But I have not fought openly and honestly. If I have fought at all, it is by ways underhand, deceitful, secret and treacherous. Have I even known whose side I have been on? An intelligencer is sometimes likened to a soldier in that he serves the same cause and brings about the same end. But intelligence is a dirty business – and I have made of it something dirtier still.

What detritus lies beneath the calm and pleasant surface of the sea! – the rotting bodies of prey and drowned men, discarded possessions – and what storms it holds in its potential! Thus too is the mind of man.

She hadn't stopped to ask why she had rung Fournier about the notebook. It wasn't his area of expertise and he probably wouldn't be able to help her. The case she had to make was tenuous, based on a few snippets of equivocal evidence. But he

was open-minded, sufficiently detached from the problem to be able to see it objectively, and she trusted his judgement. What did it matter? Did she need a rationale for everything she did?

75.

> Richard always said that possessions dragged a man down and fettered his spirit; that while his mind was employed about the upkeep of his house or estate, protecting his silver from burglars or his gold from thieves, it was proportionately less applied to those important matters which he called ‘The Questions of Life’. He nonetheless held a few possessions sacred, most of which never left his person, being carried round with him wherever he went, in the pockets of one or other of his garments.
>
> William Montagu, *Memoir of Richard Turnbull*

‘Is that Julia Dalton?’ The voice of an old woman; well-bred, a southern accent. ‘Julia, my name is Frances Brooke. I saw your notice in the *London Review of Books*. You may be interested to know that I have some objects which belonged to Richard Turnbull.’

‘I put that advert in over a year ago.’

‘I know. I only read back issues; my friend passes them on to me.’

Dusk was falling by the time Julia got to Frances Brooke’s house in Hampstead. She had lost her way, walking twice past Freud’s house, its exquisite bay window on the first floor lit up in the late October gloom. Ms Brooke’s front door was opened by a tall woman of at least eighty, with short grey hair, a tweed skirt and brightly-polished brown brogues.

‘Julia, come in. I’m Margaret Forbes, Frances’s companion.’ She led Julia up the stairs into a room which ran the length of the house, a wide leaded window at each end. A fire was burning in the blue-and-white tiled fireplace.

‘Frances, this is Julia.’

Frances was smaller than Margaret, but equally thin, her white hair swept into a neat bun at the nape of her neck.

‘You know, no one has ever shown an interest in these things before.’

‘How did you come by them?’

‘My husband was a collector – you’ll see that when I take you into his museum – we always called it his museum, even though it’s just a room. He wanted to work at the British Museum, like me, but his father had made him go into the family business. Of course that was good for me – we wouldn’t have been able to live here if he hadn’t made so much money. But he was a frustrated collector. So he bought things for himself. All above-board, of course. Come along, I’ll show you.’

‘What about tea?’ said Margaret.

‘Oh, we’ll have tea later. If Julia would like to stay for tea, of course. We toast on the fire in the winter,’ she explained, ‘like in the old days.’ She led Julia downstairs again, then down another flight of steps into a basement. When she flicked the switch, three bright overhead lights showed a large room crammed with display cabinets and cupboards. Behind a glass door Julia glimpsed a stuffed monkey, its arm raised uncannily above its head, a miniature tea service on the shelf underneath.

‘Gregory died ten years ago, but we’ve kept everything just as he left it. He’s still with us in spirit.’ She took a bunch of keys from a desk drawer and unlocked a low cabinet in a corner. ‘I saw your advert and recognized the name. I did his cataloguing, you see – Gregory wanted long lists of everything, in minute detail, even though his attitude to classification was somewhat unconventional. And my memory’s still good; I only forget the things I want to.’

‘Like your doctor’s appointments,’ said Margaret from the doorway. ‘The next one’s tomorrow, you know.’

‘Here we are.’

Frances lifted a cardboard box onto the desk. On the card in its brass holder had been written in a neat sloping hand the words ‘Richard Turnbull. 1846’.

‘Gregory bought the pieces at auction. A very long time ago. We didn’t have much money in those days, so he could only buy the cheaper things.’

Julia looked at the contents of the box. There was a list, written in the same hand:

Eighteenth-century gentleman’s pocket watch; gilt metal cases; white enamel dial with Roman and Arabic numerals; case engraved with monogram ‘RT’. Chas. Matthews, London, c. 1760.

First edition (1794) of Thomas Paine’s *Age of Reason*, Part I; poor condition: boards loose, spine cracked.

Letter, undated (late eighteenth century?).

Scrap of card, undated.

Lock of woman's hair.

'How do you know it's a woman's hair?' Julia asked.

'The piece of paper it's folded up in gives her name.' Frances lifted the square of brown paper, tied with yellowing thread, and unfolded it, very gently. A lock of black hair lay, curling slightly, within the folds. Across the inside of the paper was written, in what Julia recognized as Richard Turnbull's hand, *Sophie Breuil, L'Abbaye, 7th February, 1794.*

'Gregory liked it because it was mysterious. Who was she? And what abbey was she connected with? Had she become a nun?'

'It's the Abbaye prison, in Paris. Sophie du Breuil was held there briefly during the Terror. She was guillotined on the eighth of February. He must have visited her the day before.'

'To think we've had these things all this time, and never knew what a sad story they held.'

Julia looked at the letter. It was faded and worn through at the folds.

My dear Robert,

I beg you will forgive me for not imparting this news of my departure to you in person. I wished to spare us both the pain of a parting which, though it may not be avoided, would draw down on me your – not unjustified – recriminations. I wished also to avoid the sight of your grief, the temptation it would induce in me to remain, to be turned from the Almighty's purpose.

You must believe me, Robert, when I tell you that it is not because I have not been happy here that I leave this dear home; not because I have not loved you and my darling Richard. On the contrary, it is because I have been too happy, have loved you both too much. The one reason which could bring me to this recourse is the knowledge that the Almighty demands it; that it is an act of love and obedience towards Him; a necessary step in the salvation, not only of my soul, but of yours and Richard's. I take this step, not to hurt you, but to save you. You have, I know, always censured the more enthusiastic forms of religion, but I can only explain what has of late been my experience. I have been touched, Robert, by the tender hand of the Holy Ghost; it is He who is now my husband and master, who has demanded this sacrifice of me.

Never to see you again – never to look upon your blue eyes which only ever looked upon me with kindness; never to see my darling boy again – it would break my heart, Robert, if it were not the first step in the fulfilment of a greater purpose: that I may make certain of seeing you both again for all eternity. To know that God has called me to Himself, both in this life and the next, that I am welcomed into the divine arms, to experience the fruits of everlasting peace – oh, Robert, what inexpressible joy it gives me to know this!

Dearest Robert, I implore you, do not set your heart against that Love. Turn now, while you still can, while the arms are still outstretched to welcome you. It is where you belong, Robert. Do not let the blandishments of Reason, or of intellect – the puffed-up pride of Man – separate you from the love of God. Salvation is a divine mystery incapable of scrutiny by the human mind, which can so easily be turned to the service of the Evil One. Do not let your cleverness deceive you. Cast it aside; it is to the poor and the humble, to those who know and own their intellectual impoverishment, that the Kingdom belongs.

You will understand, that only this certainty of a better world would have induced me to leave your roof. It is to the Chapel of Women that I go; not of my own volition – for it breaks my heart to leave your side, to abandon our son – but for the sake of Him who gave up His own Son for our sake.

So forgive me and follow. Kiss Richard for me. Until such time as we meet before the throne of Heaven, where I pray night and day you will be received, I remain,

for ever

your wife

Anna.

She reread it, then stared at it for a long while. This must be the letter Richard Turnbull had carried around with him all his life; the letter Manon de Saint-Gilles had found when she searched his greatcoat, assuming it had been written by an English wife he wished to keep secret. So many secrets, so many misreadings of the facts.

‘Can you explain what that’s about, as well?’ asked Frances.

‘Some of it.’

‘Well, look at these other things, then we’ll go and have tea. I’m ravenous now.’

The scrap of card had one torn edge. In the middle was written – in a hand Julia did not recognize – the word ‘Demo’. Julia turned it over. There was nothing on the back.

‘I’ve always wondered about it,’ said Frances. ‘ “Demo” is such a modern word. We went on a few demos in the sixties, didn’t we, Margaret? With Gregory. Terribly exciting. My parents were horrified, but that was half the fun.’

‘Not as horrified as when we set up here in a ménage-à-trois,’ said Margaret. ‘And that was with three relationships, not two,’ she added to Julia. ‘Do you find that very shocking?’

‘Not at all.’

‘But we looked the word up in the Oxford,’ continued Frances. ‘ “Demo.” As an abbreviation for “demonstration” it wasn’t used until the early years of the century – I mean the last century; I still can’t get used to the fact that we’re now in the twenty-first. So we thought perhaps the card might just have got mixed up with Richard Turnbull’s things by mistake.’

‘I think I might know what it is,’ said Julia.

‘Well, come upstairs again and tell us all about it. Margaret, time to get the kettle on. You can come back to the things later if you wish.’

Margaret toasted crumpets and thick slices of white bread from a homemade loaf on the kitchen fire and passed them to Frances who smeared them with soft butter which had been warming on the mantelpiece. There was a seed cake, and a large pot of tea.

‘Tell us about the slip of card,’ said Frances, cutting herself a large slice of cake. ‘I’m all agog.’

‘If it’s what I think it is, it was the sign for an uprising.’

‘It’s French, then? Like the lock of hair?’

‘No, this was in England. About 1819 or 1820, I think.’

‘An uprising in England? How dreadful. I thought we didn’t go in for that sort of thing.’

‘There never was one. But it came pretty close at times. This was in the north; in Yorkshire I think, or Lancashire. I don’t really know much about it; I just remember reading about the cards and that stuck in my memory. The insurgents were given the half of the card that said “Demo”; the other half of the card had the letters “cracy” written on it, to complete the word “Democracy”; when those second halves were given out, it was the sign that the uprising was about to begin.’

‘And what happened?’

‘It fizzled out. Nothing came of it.’

‘Does this mean, then, that your man was a naughty boy? An insurgent?’

‘It could do. It certainly looks that way, from other evidence I’ve come across. But there’s a possibility he might have been a government spy, or even a provocateur.’

76.

The trial of Henri Jacques de Saint-Gilles, for High Treason
30th January 1813
XIX.

Mr Ratcliffe:	We will turn to your association with the itinerant preacher Mr Ezekiel Juggins. We have heard how, during the months in which you were, as you claim, tracking down the French spy, you spent no small amount of time in pursuit of this man, is that not so?
Richard Turnbull:	It is.
Mr Ratcliffe:	Can you explain why you found this dissenting ranter so interesting a subject?
Richard Turnbull:	It is as I have explained: his appearance at the house in Litchfield-street was suspicious.
Mr Ratcliffe:	Litchfield-street being the site of the house believed to be the head quarters of the spy. You had no previous connexion with Juggins?
Richard Turnbull:	I had not.
Mr Ratcliffe:	No personal connexion?
Richard Turnbull:	No.
Mr Ratcliffe:	I advise you to think very carefully, Mr Turnbull, before you answer. I ask you again, did you or did you not have a personal connexion with the preacher Ezekiel Juggins?
Richard Turnbull:	I did not.
Mr Ratcliffe:	Very well. Might you explain, therefore, how you came to know in such detail his theology – if we may call it that?
Richard Turnbull:	They were details I came by during the course of my investigations. I have explained to Mr Solicitor-General, that

I travelled with Juggins for a while; during which time he explained his ideas at agonising length.

Mr Ratcliffe: Yet the connexion between Juggins and the spy ring was in fact very tenuous, is that not so?

Richard Turnbull: It is, as I have explained.

Mr Ratcliffe: You left London on what date in pursuit of Juggins?

Richard Turnbull: On the 20th of July.

Mr Ratcliffe: And you returned to London when?

Richard Turnbull: It was the beginning of September; the 1st or the 2nd.

Mr Ratcliffe: So you spent more than a month of your investigation pursuing this man who turned out to have but a very unimportant link to the spy you were trying to discover. Can you explain, Mr Turnbull, why you first chose to investigate Juggins? Why not any of the other visitors to Litchfield-street?

Richard Turnbull: I had to make a decision. I chose to follow Juggins. I intended to return and investigate the others at a later date.

Mr Ratcliffe: And you did this?

Richard Turnbull: I did not, in fact. My investigation of Juggins, tenuous though his link was with the spy, had led me nonetheless to material information regarding the identity of that spy. On my return I saw Mr Price entering the house in Litchfield-street and chose to pursue my investigations through him.

Mr Ratcliffe: You mentioned to Mr Solicitor-General that the inmates of the Dover garrison judged Juggins to be – how did you put it – ‘an emissary from hell’. Might I enquire how you came by this information?

Richard Turnbull: They told me.

Mr Ratcliffe: They told you when?

Richard Turnbull: When I visited the garrison.

Mr Ratcliffe: And that was in what month?

Richard Turnbull: In July of last year.

Mr Ratcliffe: And what reason did you have for visiting the garrison?

Richard Turnbull: I followed Juggins there. I spoke to some of the soldiers to ascertain his business there.

Mr Ratcliffe: Yet you had been to the garrison before, had you not, Mr Turnbull?

Richard Turnbull: I had, several years before.

Mr Ratcliffe: And what had been your business then?

Richard Turnbull: I had no business in particular. I stopped at the garrison on my travels round Kent.

Mr Ratcliffe: And indulged in a little preaching on your own account, did you not?

Richard Turnbull: I am not sure what you mean.

Mr Ratcliffe: I will put it more clearly since you seem to be determined to ignore my meaning. I mean that you openly preached your radical and atheist views to the soldiers in the garrison! Is that not so?

Richard Turnbull: I did not preach. I merely discussed.

Mr Ratcliffe: Yet does not the mere discussion of such frightful doctrines as those of atheism and Jacobinism border on treason?

Richard Turnbull: I would disagree. As Mr Henry More has stated: ‘Discussion is no prejudice but an honour to the truth’.

Mr Ratcliffe: It seems to me, Mr Turnbull, that Mr Price is not the only man in this court today who has the ability to sail close to the wind, yet remain seemingly on the right side of it. I would ask the gentlemen of the jury to consider, whether a man who encourages the discussion, as you put it, of such odious subjects as these can ever be trusted. But we will pass on. Mr Turnbull, you are no doubt aware of the fate which befell the said Ezekiel Juggins on the night of the 5th of September 1812, just four days after you had followed him back to London from the north of England? That he was stabbed in the neck and left for dead? That he died the next morning?

Richard Turnbull: I heard of it.

Mr Ratcliffe: And what is your opinion of it?

Richard Turnbull: That upon occasion thieves and footpads in the night can be the instrument of justice.

Mr Ratcliffe: You had no great opinion of the man?

Richard Turnbull: His soul stank as did his vermin-ridden body.

Mr Ratcliffe: And on what did you base that opinion?

Richard Turnbull: On his merciless treatment of the girls and women he pretended to save. On the hypocrisy of his life.

Mr Ratcliffe:	Did you have a part in his death?
Richard Turnbull:	I did not.
Mr Ratcliffe:	You are certain of that?
Richard Turnbull:	I am certain.
Mr Ratcliffe:	How did you know he was killed by thieves or footpads?
Richard Turnbull:	It was the word on the street. It was later in the news-paper.
Mr Ratcliffe:	It is a great coincidence, is it not, Mr Turnbull, that this man, meddling ranter though he may have been, should have been knifed to death immediately following your investigation of him?
Richard Turnbull:	One thing may follow another, without being caused by it. Juggins had other enemies.
Mr Ratcliffe:	You admit, then, that you were his enemy?
Richard Turnbull:	I have already admitted that. I loathe many men; I have killed none.
Mr Ratcliffe:	The information which you sold to Mr Price, to what exactly did it relate?
Richard Turnbull:	To ships at Liverpool.
Mr Ratcliffe:	To the actual state of ships at Liverpool?
Richard Turnbull:	Yes.
Mr Ratcliffe:	Information of a sensitive nature, therefore?
Richard Turnbull:	Not information which should have been secret. It was such as any person walking in the harbour would have been able to ascertain.
Mr Ratcliffe:	Mixed with ‘a judicious amount of make-believe’, I think you said?
Richard Turnbull:	I think those were my words.
Mr Ratcliffe:	Let me put it to you, Mr Turnbull, that your whole life is tinged with a deal of make-believe. Whether it be judicious or not, we shall have to see.

77.

She woke out of deep sleep, her head on his shoulder, his hair tickling her face; opened her eyes on the high, corniced ceiling. A faint glow from street lamp below passed through the gaps in the wooden shutters.

‘You’re awake, then?’ He ran his hand through her hair, kissed her cheek.

‘What time is it?’

‘About one.’

‘O God, I’ve got to get back to my hotel.’

‘No, stay. Please.’

‘My pyjamas are at the hotel.’

‘I’ll find you something. Glass of wine?’

‘At one in the morning?’

‘I didn’t think you were that conventional.’

‘I’m not. Actually, I’d love a glass of wine.’

He brought two glasses on a tray, fetched her a shirt from his wardrobe. ‘Will this do? I don’t wear pyjamas.’

‘It’s far too nice to wear in bed.’

He kissed the top of her head. She leant back on the pillows.

‘It’s a …,’ she said, then changed her mind. No, I won’t tell you what I think until you’ve seen it.’

‘Seen what?’

‘The notebook. The problem notebook.’

‘You’re obsessed, Julia, do you know that? Utterly and completely.’

‘So I’ve been told. I take no notice. But do you know what I really like about you?’

‘You mean apart from my manly charm and my scintillating intellect?’

‘Apart from that.’

‘Go on.’

‘It’s that when you say to me, “You’re obsessed,” it’s not a condemnation. You don’t see it as a perversion.’

‘It’s not. There are some jobs for which obsession is a pre-requisite. My music teacher told me I’d never make the grade as a cellist because I wasn’t obsessed enough. Passion is important.’

‘But intellectual passion is often considered suspect, don’t you find? Or irrelevant.’

‘Does that matter?’

‘I suppose not; it just makes it hard sometimes.’

‘All passion is dangerous. Ecstasy, enthusiasm, love. They all border on insanity.’

‘You’re too good to be true, do you know that?’

‘Ah, but appearances can be deceptive, can’t they?’

The next morning they sat on opposite sides of the long dining table and, over tartines and bowls of strong milky coffee, she showed him the two notebooks. The sun came out and slanted its rays across the table and she fell into a daze. Was this happiness? It won’t last, this sunny November morning in this old room with its glass-fronted bookcases, its leather books, french window and tiny balcony. It will move on, inexorable as the earth turning on its axis, and with it the sense of being in the right place, of being more truly herself than she has ever been, sitting at a table in a room full of old-new light reading a manuscript, opposite a man she knows and hardly knows, his hair hastily tied back, his head bent, scowling over the notebooks she has brought to show him. A dangerous place; a happiness which encapsulates all sorts of perils. Tumbling helplessly.

He lifted his head from the notebooks, still frowning.

‘You suspect it’s a forgery? That’s what you were going to say last night – this morning?’

‘Yes. But there’s very little to prove it.’

‘I agree. I wouldn’t have been able to tell if it wasn’t for the fact that these accounts you’ve marked up don’t agree. If it is a forgery, it’s a very skilful one. Explain to me your grounds for thinking so.’ He poured the last of the coffee into her bowl, which was decorated with a picture of a man and a woman in traditional Breton costume, topped it up with milk. She cupped the bowl in both hands.

‘I’ve only got two. Or perhaps three. First, the factual discrepancies: the two different accounts of Turnbull’s mother’s death; the absence of any mention in the other journal – Marchmont’s – of the mad preacher Juggins – or Enwright as he was known in the 1780s. I recently came across the letter that Turnbull’s mother wrote to her husband when she ran away to join Enwright’s sect – so I know that account is

true. But if Turnbull only wrote about that incident once, in this journal that I got hold of, then Marchmont wouldn't know anything about it.'

'And your second reason?'

'A couple of anachronisms. The word "camaraderie" isn't attested in English till 1840. That notebook was finished in 1830 – the date's very conveniently given at the end. But …'

'But Turnbull knew French, so he could have used it as a foreign word?'

'Exactly. That's the problem with this sort of analysis: just because a word isn't found in any major text before a certain date doesn't mean categorically that it wasn't used.'

'And what's the other word?'

'It's an expression Turnbull uses. Here,' she took the book and found a page, 'he uses the expression "a war gone cold". As in "cold war". As a piece of evidence, it's even more flimsy than the other, but in a way I find it more convincing. It's the sort of slip a modern writer might make without even realizing it. But it doesn't make a case.'

'Have you had the notebook checked out by an expert?'

'Yes. I took it to a specialist in London. It cost me a fortune. He said it was definitely an authentic notebook. The paper checks out. But that doesn't mean its content is authentic. Marchmont told me he'd picked it up in a second-hand bookshop. He might have been telling the truth; it might just have been blank when he bought it.'

'But what if someone else had forged it and he just happened to come across it? Can you prove he carried out the forgery?'

'No. All I've got is a few bits of evidence and a gut feeling. Just about the flimsiest case possible, I know.'

'What about the handwriting? They look the same to me, but you're the expert.'

'I wouldn't know the difference. As you said, if it is a forgery, it's a brilliant one. I've gone over and over it, but there's nothing which couldn't have been produced by Turnbull himself. Everything about its production is spot-on.'

'You said you had three reasons for believing it to be a forgery.'

'Well, it's not really a reason. Just an instinct about Marchmont. I told you last summer I didn't trust him, didn't I?'

'Yes. We were sitting in the orchard of the Château Ruffec.'

‘And he used a false name when he first contacted me. When I happened to find out his real name and challenged him, he blustered about it being innocuous, a bit of fun. I didn’t think that much of it at the time.’

‘How did you find out? His real name?’

‘My ex-boyfriend is a police detective. He found out. Peter runs a café. A very good café, actually. But he’s obsessed with clearing Saint-Gilles’s name.’

‘Why?’

‘He’s convinced he’s descended from Henri de Saint-Gilles. Through Raoul. Which may be the case, but he seems at the same time to be unaware of who Raoul’s father was.’

‘And you’ve not told him?’

‘No.’

‘So what are you going to do? About the notebooks?’

‘What would you do?’

‘Confront him. See how he reacts. I don’t think there’s much else you can do. If he comes clean you can ignore it; if not, you can mention the notebook in your thesis and discuss your reservations. Without imputing blame.’

‘In a way I feel sorry for him. He’s like a child – even though he’s so much older than me. It’s as if he needs my approval. I’ve warmed to him in a way – though he still gives me the creeps.’

‘I’ve not been much help, have I?’

‘Oh, I don’t know. And at least we’ve got one thing sorted out.’

‘The sex? It was always going to happen, wasn’t it?’

‘I suppose it was.’

‘You don’t regret it, do you?’

‘Of course not.’

‘But?’

‘Why but?’

‘There’s always a but.’

‘I suppose there is. But it’s too soon to talk about that. Let me buy you lunch.’

When she kissed him goodbye at the Gare du Nord the next day, she was already thinking of her next meeting with Peter Marchmont. He held her a few moments. ‘Ring me,’ he said. And she thought she detected a look of complicity, as if he

understood where her mind was, and was unfazed by that. She spent the two hours of the journey deciphering the next section of Turnbull's journal.

27th November, 1812

What can I say? Evidence overwhelming against my friend. A dangerous thing, to trust another, to allow one's heart to be given in friendship or love. This friendship at least I thought safe. But he too is a traitor.

Yet are we not all traitors of one sort or another? Do we not all betray what we hold most dear? And I have increased my stock of treachery, merely by the conversation I had with him yesterday, giving an enemy of the state an opportunity to escape judgement.

He little suspected, when I called upon him, as I have done so many times over the past two happy years, the dreadful business on which I had come. Why, Richard, what ails you? Your absence has made you ill? he said, on seeing the grim expression I carried into his parlour behind his manservant.

Yet he laughed in my face when I told him the purpose of my visit.

— Go now, I told him. The game is up, and I am duty bound to reveal your identity. But he said I would not do it, because I had myself too much to lose.

— Suppose I am tried for treason, he said. For spying for the French. Do you not think that your past deeds will come out? If I hang, you hang with me.

— But it will not stop you hanging, Henri. For pity's sake, do you not see? You cannot continue here. I am risking my life to give you the chance to get away.

He slumped on the chaise longue by the window and loosened his cravat a little. Sit down, Richard, he said; though you have been very clever in tracking me down – without even the slightest suspicion on my part – there are things of which you are ignorant. You have not, contrary to what you may think, played the best hand.

— What do you mean?

He called for a bottle of claret and two glasses, and gave instructions that we were not to be disturbed. After drinking in silence for several minutes, he said, with a smile, — You do not know who I am, do you, Richard? Poor, silly Richard, thinking an old friend just happened to turn up in London, and loved him so much he took lodgings near him in this dreary little village. Help yourself to more wine; there will be little enough of it in Newgate.

— It is you who are hell-bent for Newgate.

— So you think. But you should know, Richard, that the reality of things seldom coincides with their appearance.

— You are speaking in riddles, for God's sake.

— You pretend to be unaware of your crime?

— Of what crime? If you mean the events of twenty years ago, you had as much involvement in that as I.

— It is not to Paris that I refer.

— To what, then?

— Do not play the ignorant, Richard. It tires me.

— Henri, I swear I do not know what you mean.

— Oh, the scoundrel swears he does not know what I mean. Dieu, Richard, you are either very obstinate or very stupid. Do you really think I could be your friend after your conduct towards my sister?

— What?

— Oh, the fellow has forgotten her. Or doesn't give three damns, more like. You behaved like a wretch of the ancien régime.

— I seem to remember you bedded a few women during our time in Paris. I am sure some of them were other men's sisters.

— But you broke her heart. Though she loved the child to distraction, she never recovered from your abandonment.

— My God, Henri, what are you talking about?

— You had so infatuated her, that she would not look at another man. She refused to marry, either before or after the child, clung to your bastard as to the last remnant of her life. I would have had Raoul left on the Ile d'Oléron and brought up by my great-aunt. But she would have none of it; and she languished for you for the remainder of her life. You are responsible for her death.

— Death? Child? She had a child?

— Do not pretend obtuseness, Richard. You must have known. Your child. And you had loved another not four months before.

78.

It was dark and an icy rain was bouncing off the pavement when Julia got off the bus in Greenwich. She had suggested meeting once more at the Spanish Galleon; it might help, she thought, if she could recall her early feelings of suspicion and distrust for John Selby.

'I won't beat about the bush,' she said once she had carried her glass of orange juice from the bar to the corner where he was sitting with his usual pint of bitter. He looked up at her peremptory tone. She slapped the notebook down on the table between them.

'I believe this notebook is a forgery,' she said in a low voice. 'A brilliant one; but a forgery nonetheless.'

He smiled. 'Miss Dalton, let's conduct this discussion on grounds favoured by you. Let me ask you: what is your evidence for this monstrous accusation?'

'The content of the notebook.'

'By which you mean the fact that it tells a different story from the one you want to believe.'

'It's not just that it tells a different story of the spying affair. There are other things which don't add up. The first is that Turnbull seems to have recorded two completely different accounts of his mother's death.'

'Oh really?'

'I've got photocopies here,' she said, pulling out a plastic wallet from her bag, 'of the notebook in my possession. According to the account given there, Richard Turnbull's mother died, not of smallpox, but of TB contracted after she'd joined an odd religious sect in 1787. An account which conflicts with yours.'

'Which means nothing. Turnbull, we know, made things up as he went along. What's to stop me accusing your notebook of being a forgery? Can you prove mine is inauthentic?'

'No. But I do have independent evidence which shows that the account I have of Anna Turnbull's death is correct.'

'And is that the only evidence you've got?'

'There are inconsistencies, inaccuracies, in your text.'

'Such as?'

'Linguistic errors. Anachronisms.'

‘Not much, is it?’

‘No, I admit it’s not much. But I’m right, aren’t I? How did you come by the notebook.’

‘I told you; I picked it up in a second-hand bookshop. Off Tottenham Court Road. I may still have the receipt, as a matter of fact.’

‘Blank?’

‘Pardon me?’

‘Was the book blank when you bought it?’

He stared down sullenly at his pint.

‘I’ve seen his ghost, you know,’ he said at last.

‘Pardon me?’

‘Henri. I’ve seen his ghost.’

She put down her glass and stared at him.

‘That seems to surprise you.’

‘I don’t believe in ghosts.’

‘And does that mean they don’t exist?’

‘There’s no evidence for them.’

He laughed. ‘There’s very little evidence that my notebook is a forgery; that doesn’t stop you believing it.’

‘So tell me about Saint-Gilles’s ghost.’

There was a long pause, then he began to speak. ‘He appeared to me first when I was ten. I bought the Blue Teapot because that was the scene of his arrest. He comes back every year. Around the time that he was arrested.’

‘He comes into the café? Does anyone else see him?’

‘No. He visits after hours, in my … in my private rooms.’

‘And what does he look like?’

‘Just like he did when he lived in London, I suppose. Knee breeches, silk stockings, shirt, cravat.’

‘And I presume his body has been reconstituted? He doesn’t carry his decapitated head under his arm? His entrails aren’t hanging out?’

‘Your mockery is beneath you. You sound like a schoolgirl.’

‘OK, so you see Saint-Gilles’s ghost. That still begs the question of how you know your version of events is the true one.’

‘Because he told me.’

‘He told you.’

‘Yes, he told me.’ He took a mouthful of beer.

‘And you took his word for it. But aren’t you interested in finding out the truth?’

‘The truth, Miss Dalton? I know the truth. I’ve known it for thirty-odd years, in here’ – he tapped his chest. ‘That’s true knowledge, a higher form of evidence. Sometimes you just know something, in your heart, in your gut, without the need for proof. Do you have a boyfriend, Miss Dalton?’

‘Why do you ask?’

‘Because when you fall in love, do you stop to ask how you know you’re in love? Do you ask for proof and evidence?’

‘Falling in love – whatever that might mean – is a psychological state. Not one, by the way, that I confuse with mere lust. It’s not the same thing as a historical event which is potentially verifiable. You’ve met the ghost of Saint-Gilles and seem prepared to believe everything he tells you. But have you ever stopped to think that your ghost might be telling you a lie? Or that he might be a projection of your own fantasies?’

He tossed his head. ‘Nonsense. Henri wouldn’t lie to me.’

‘Yet some of what he’s told you is untrue.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Was it Henri who told you you’re descended from him?’

‘I’d found out beforehand, from an aunt of mine who did research into our family tree.’

‘But he confirmed it?’

‘That was why he’d appeared to me in the first place.’

‘But he’s only told you half the truth, do you know that?’

‘What do you mean?’

‘How are you descended from Saint-Gilles?’

‘From his nephew. We’ve been over this before.’

‘Raoul?’

‘Yes, of course from Raoul.’

‘But you don’t know who Raoul’s father was?’

‘Nobody knows. Raoul was illegitimate. But Henri brought him up as his own, gave him the name Saint-Gilles. That’s good enough for me.’

‘Well, I’m sorry, Peter, but I’ve got some bad news for you. I’ve been doing that low-grade sort of activity, searching for evidence. It is true that Raoul de Saint-Gilles was Rosine’s son, Henri’s nephew, and that Henri adopted him. But his biological father was Richard Turnbull.’

He stared at her for a moment. ‘That’s plain ridiculous. I’d have thought you’d be above that sort of silliness. Or are you just trying to get back at me for …’

‘For what? For concocting a forgery that obfuscates the truth? Richard Turnbull’s relationship to Raoul de Saint-Gilles is a fact. I have evidence which links Turnbull and Rosine de Saint-Gilles as lovers. There can be very little doubt that he was the father of her only child.’

She hadn’t meant it to slip out like that, but she knew she’d gone too far when she saw the look in his eyes. It was as if a mask had dropped from his face, which had turned a deathly shade of grey; she wondered for a moment if he was about to have a heart attack. He stood up, his arms flailing as if he were fending off an invisible attacker. His hand caught the half-empty beer glass, which crashed onto the floor next to Julia and shattered. Picking up his coat from the seat next to him, he shoved aside the small table and rushed out of the pub.

‘You all right?’ said the barman who came to sweep up the pieces of broken glass.

‘Yes, thanks. I told him something he didn’t want to hear. I’m sorry about the mess.’

‘Not your fault. Still, with a temper like that, you’re probably better off without him.’

When she got home, Julia sat for a while in her armchair with her eyes shut. Then she got out Marchmont’s notebook, which she’d retrieved from the pub table, spattered in beer. She laid it out on her desk so its damp pages could dry. For the first time, she felt she wanted to be rid of this project, get it over and done with and move on. She’d not handled the conversation with Marchmont at all well. She’d allowed herself to get angry and her mention of Raoul’s parentage had side-tracked the matter of the notebook. But what did she expect, blurting out information like that?

She needed to plough on with the Greek journal, which she still hadn’t finished. She rested her head on her hand and looked over the next section.

I sank onto the chair by the window and put my head in my hands.

— I knew nothing of the child, Henri, I said. And I have no explanation for my behaviour. It happened; I am not proud of it. God knows I had not forgotten Sophie – my heart aches still for her – but –

— But you took comfort where you could. With my sister. And then you abandoned her.

— But I swear I did not know about the child. We quarrelled – a bitter quarrel; she said I had deceived her – though she would not say how, or how she knew – and that she wished never to see me again. If she knew then that she was carrying a child, she said nothing of it. She said she hated me. She told me to go away and never, ever, return. Later, I wrote to her. Three times, perhaps four. But I received no reply, and presumed she was angry with me still. They were strange times, as you know. I looked for you when I returned to Paris, but could find no trace of you, and I came back to England.

— Our paths must have crossed. I returned to the château a few days after Thermidor. But what you say about writing is a lie. No letters arrived at the château that summer. Or winter, or the next year, or the next.

— Yet I wrote – I swear to you I wrote. You said she died?

— Four, nearly five years ago. It was then that I came to England.

— Why not sooner? If it was so important to you, why not come sooner?

— It was only after her death that I learnt your identity.

— What?

— She refused to divulge it. Even in death she was faithful to you.

— But Manon also knew my name – my alias at least – and you would have recognised that!

— Indeed. But Manon had her own game. There was always something intractable about my elder sister, but after that summer she was more obdurate than ever. After Rosine's death, however, she relented.

— How did she die?

— She was never well after that year. Even after the birth of the child – whom she adored – she lived under a shadow. I often caught her looking towards the west gate of the park, as if hoping for someone to come riding down the drive. She declined steadily, year after year. It was a fever in the end, but that was merely the means death used to take her. She was only half alive. You cannot imagine it. You no doubt saw her as she really was, vivacious and charming, full of exuberance.

— And the child?

— He died of the same fever as his mother, survived her by a few months only. A boy of fourteen. She called him Raoul, after his father. Little did she know that you had come to her with a false name. That you were a fiction.

— Of course I used a false name. That was my identity. What would you have done? You have lived with two names in England! But did you not suspect that I was the visitor to the château that summer?

— I half suspected, especially when she named him Raoul. But both my sisters told of an Alsatian visitor; Manon refused to give any details and Rosine told me his real name was Robert. In that she deceived me. I had nothing else to go on, and business kept me at Ruffec for several years. Besides, I had told you of the château's location only in the vaguest terms. How did you turn up there?

— I remembered having seen the address on your writing desk. I thought I might as well go there as anywhere, especially if news of our *escapade* had not yet reached the provinces.

We sat silent a few moments. I had stowed away that experience in a corner of my mind; it stunned me to have it taken out again and aired.

— But how did you find me? I asked. If you had only the name Raoul Akermann to go on?

— By chance alone. When I came to London, I discovered Mr Ackermann's bookshop in the Strand. I thought, since you had used that name – or one very similar to it – as your *alias*, that you might be connected in some way with the shop, or with its proprietor. I was wrong in that, as I have since realised. But I visited the shop frequently, and one day …

— You met me coming out of it.

— And two old friends were reunited. A touching little tale. And you had no idea of my intentions.

— So when you came to live here – it was not out of friendship, but because you intended to take revenge on me?

— Quite so.

— Yet you revealed nothing of this. Of your hatred, your resentment. For two years we have lived side-by-side as friends – it has been one of the happiest times of my life, you, me and Montagu – and yet ...

— Your naivety astounds me, Richard. We are spies, you and I both. We each live a double life woven out of untruth and make-believe. Even if you had laid that life aside – which I am sure you have not – you must have known that it would colour all the rest. Do you think a pair of old spies can be friends as other men are? We were bred to duplicity and guile. We each know too much about the other…

— You admit then, that you are a spy?

— Of course I admit it. I have never given up my allegiance to my country, as you appear to have done to the cause you once espoused.

He will hang, then. He refuses to leave the country, believes I have not the courage to see this thing through.

79.

The morning after his meeting with Julia Dalton, Peter Marchmont was late opening the Blue Teapot and his regulars noted how unwell he seemed; he looked pale, with dark bags under his eyes; his voice hoarse. But he was courteous as ever, his apron spotless and his smile perfect.

On returning to the Blue Teapot the previous evening, he had locked the door, thrown his keys on the table and climbed the stairs to his bedroom. The keys to the attic study were hidden at the back of a drawer in his wardrobe. He didn't stop to close up the wardrobe again but raced up the final flight of stairs and fumbled with the lock. Slamming the door behind him, he collapsed on the chair at his desk.

'So what have you got to say for yourself?' The sound of his voice, raised in anger, cut through the silence and startled him.

'Don't pretend you can't hear me. I know you're there. You might at least show yourself and come clean. How can this be? How can she know things I don't; things you haven't told me?' Banging his fist on the desk, he struggled to his feet. 'Speak to me, for God's sake,' he shouted at the top of his voice, his arms outstretched. Nothing. No murmur, no ripple in the air; just an empty and infinite silence. Peter shuffled to the sideboard, poured a glass of wine which he knocked back, his hands shaking, then poured another.

'You deceived me.

'You can't tell me it isn't true. She wasn't trying to deceive me. I know that what she said was true.

'You've used me.

'You've got a lot to answer for.

‘Was it that you didn’t trust me that you didn’t tell me all the facts? Just like everybody else.

‘Show yourself, for God’s sake.’

But the chair remained empty, the silence eddying round his aching head.

And then he felt it invade him: a fury such as he hadn’t experienced for nearly thirty years. As an adolescent and a young man, he’d had a violent temper. It had calmed over the years, tucked away with that other Peter who didn’t come out any more. But now it returned: a sense of being beside himself; an anger which overpowered him. He had become someone else; someone he could observe pounding the desk and kicking the walls. Shouting at the top of his voice, he cursed the ghost, cursed his fate, his personality, the lousy conditions of his birth; cursed his long-dead mother and his absent father. Pacing the room, he waved his arms, bringing his fists down on the desk and shaking them at a heaven he didn’t believe in. Henri’s chair was kicked across the room. He gulped another glass of wine, then smashed the glass against the wall, swept the decanter away and heard it fall with a satisfying clatter on the floor, the wine oozing into the varnished boards.

But still the ghost did not appear. Peter, exhausted, sat suddenly in his own chair.

‘Have it your own way; I’m staying till I get some answers.’

And he remained slumped in the chair, dozing on and off, waiting for Henri; till the alarm on his watch went off at six o’clock and he brought up a dustpan and brush, a mop and a bucket from the kitchen. Sweeping up the shattered decanter from the floor, he had a shooting memory, sharp as a splinter of glass across his mind. Mark, the boy from next door. So long ago. A bony hand on Peter’s shoulder, a look of solicitude behind the circular lenses of his spectacles. ‘Your dad went berserk last night, didn’t he?’

80.

Peter Marchmont had forged the notebook and that was inexcusable. But Julia couldn’t stop thinking about him. She hadn’t handled their last meeting at all well; she’d been too hard on him, perhaps. A difficult man to fathom. Detached and hostile, sinister even; yet on his own patch he was a different person entirely. Always courteous to his punters, didn’t mind if they stayed for hours chatting over a single

cup of coffee. His food was wholesome, meticulously presented and very reasonably priced. In fact, at the Blue Teapot he appeared perfectly normal. What was a delusional who communed with a ghost doing running a successful café? Or, to look at it from another angle, what was a successful café-owner doing writing forgeries of nineteenth-century documents and believing he had a personal relationship with his eighteenth-century ancestor?

But she herself had no desire to be normal and was perhaps in her own way as obsessed as he was. And though Miles had seen her obsession as a defect, a rival almost, he himself had become obsessed with the question of Marchmont's guilt. She'd not seen Miles for some weeks; he seemed to have stopped hanging about outside the house, thank God. But in one sense, he'd been right about Marchmont. Up to no good, as he'd put it; though how he'd arrived at that conclusion she was at a loss to understand. Surely he couldn't have known about the forgeries? And what if he was right and Marchmont had stolen the documents he'd been passing to her? That would be hugely problematic; but he surely had no evidence? He'd have told her if he had.

Strange thing, obsession. She'd looked the word up one evening when she'd been feeling tired and depressed and in need of comfort. A cup of coffee and an hour with the *Oxford English Dictionary* online. The word, she discovered, derived from the Latin 'obsidere', to sit at or opposite to. Marchmont had told her that Saint-Gilles, when he appeared, sat opposite him on the other side of his desk. Man and ghost facing each other. Was the ghost an aspect of Peter objectified as an Other? Or just a figment of his imagination created out of a need for companionship; an imaginary friend he'd never grown out of? But Peter had sat opposite her too, on so many occasions now, exchanging papers and prickly discussions. And then there was Mathias Fournier. He'd read out the diary of Manon de Saint-Gilles, sitting across a couple of rickety tables from her in the old archive room in Poitiers. She'd sat opposite him at his dining table, drinking wine, talking, looking at the Turnbull notebooks. False and true. But what was his status in this complex sarabande that her life had turned into? There were times when he wouldn't get up and leave his place in her mind, but sat stubbornly on, his intense gaze both gentle and mordant.

But 'obsidere' also meant to besiege or possess, and Julia knew that in some sense this described her only too well. Miles was right, after all: she couldn't let this work go. It wasn't work in the normal sense. It was part of her; an intellectual passion

which would never let her go. She'd move on to other projects, but the passion would still be there. That was the thing she couldn't live without: not a man or a house, a car or any of the other trappings of middle-class life, but the passion of her mind. That might make her a freak, but it made her also what she was.

When did what was inside the head become pathological? Marchmont's belief in the ghost of Saint-Gilles was a fiction, a piece of nonsense, a refusal to see the world as it was constituted. Yet, until it had spilled over into his forgery, it had done no harm; it even seemed not to impinge on the rest of his life. Her own head was full of Richard Turnbull. He was a constant companion; sometimes it was as if she strode the streets of Paris and London with him, as if she saw him as clearly as she saw Tom and Katrina, Miles, Yvette, Fournier.

Marchmont's forgery angered her. Yet if she hadn't taken that other notebook from Bank House, she'd no doubt have been none the wiser and accepted it as fact. The true notebook would have been included in the job lot Marchmont had bought from Dot Kenton, and much of it would probably never have seen the light of day. So her success rested on an act of dubious morality which itself rested on a chance: if she hadn't put the journal on the table to look at later that evening, if she hadn't put the OS map on top of it. Strange how things turned out.

What to do about it, though? Marchmont was hardly likely to change his position; not only did he have a great deal invested in the forgery, but he refused to see the evidence in front of his eyes, rejecting anything that contradicted his view of the matter. He'd made up his mind on the word of a ghost. And that was where they parted company. But she'd let her anger get the better of her. The way she'd let slip the truth about Raoul's parentage had been thoughtless; she'd demolished a large portion of his world and his reaction had perhaps been unsurprising.

Tomorrow, she'd go and see him. Apologize, see if they couldn't come to some agreement. In the meantime she'd get on with the Greek journal, which she'd nearly finished. Richard Turnbull had, it appeared, paid a visit to Saint-Gilles in Newgate gaol between his arrest and the trial.

> Dec^{r}. 1812 Foul stench. Pathetic wretches, the dregs of civilisation. Such misery! And the poor wretch I went to see refused both money and aid of any sort, even the basket of food and wine I brought him. My erstwhile friend – and he was my friend still, when I entered the gaol – persists in his ravings against me. He will see me

damned, he says. Of all the sorry gaol visits I have made, this afternoon's the most heart-wrenching. He rants, and I know not whether what he speaks is truth or untruth, or the raving of a Madman.

It is a hazard of those who deal as we have done in shadows and in fictions, that we come in time, perhaps, to believe them.

His meeting with me on the boat to Calais in 1793 not accidental. Under instructions from the Convention Nationale he had travelled to London, to make the acquaintance of English radicals. Their purpose: an English revolution with French support, or even invasion. It is true, that there was talk of uprisings in England then; but does this corroborate what he says? (He seems at any rate unaware of my other rôle.)

Something occurred to me. I poured some wine from one of the bottles into a cup. He downed it in a single gulp and I asked him, if he knew of my being attacked near Covent Garden earlier this year.

— How could I not?

— So you were involved?

A smile crossed his once handsome features. — I instigated it. And the other.

— The other? The attack on the Common? That was only two weeks after you had moved there.

— And why not strike while the iron is hot? But the attempt was frustrated.

— They were your men?

— Of course. It is useful to have such men at one's beck and call. It was an unfortunate chance that the first time I under-estimated your strength and you got away. The second time you were lucky, the watchman entering the alley before they had finished with you.

I had sat with him an hour, uncomfortably; not just because of the stench and the noise, the scratting of the rats, but because of his hostility, his persistence in believing me his enemy. But when I stood up from the low stool which the gaoler had provided for a six-pence, he said, as quietly and as nonchalantly as if he were announcing a rainstorm in April — You know I had the power to prevent the execution of Mlle du Breuil.

At that my hand froze on the barred gate; I had been about to call the gaoler to let me out, but I turned back to Henri who sat, head bowed, a slight smile on his lips. I asked him to repeat the words he had just uttered. He looked up at me, then. — You heard, he said. I had the power to prevent her execution.

— Then in God's name why did you not?

— It would have injured our cause. The cause above everything; that was what we swore; you have forgotten that now, as you forgot it then.

— But the cause was already lost, for pity's sake!

— There can be no pity, Richard. Then or now. This is not a game we play – though it seems that is what it always was to you.

— But how could the cause be served by allowing an innocent woman to go to her death? Tell me, how?

— I do not deny that some went to the guillotine who need not have done. Our revolution was a drastic purgative on the nation; a few gripes were only to be expected. For the greater good.

— But did it cleanse the *Patrie*?

— If it did not, it was perhaps that the purge was not strong enough or did not last long enough. But who are you to question? You who have switched sides.

— And you have not switched sides, yet the government you serve now hardly embraces the beliefs we fought for then. That is little different from switching sides, if your loyalty is to a trumped-up emperor as autocratic as Louis Capet.

— Oh, come, Richard. Loyalty is loyalty, and a turncoat deserves to die.

— I retain loyalty to the principles I fought for.

— And your British government is now a supporter of those radical beliefs you so fervently supported in your youth?

— Indeed not. But one can lend support only to one side or another; and, though I hate them both – I lowered my voice – I had rather serve an extravagant whoremonger than an imperious imperialist.

— Buonaparte has unified the nation and brought it victory.

— And led hundreds of thousands of your compatriots to freezing defeat in Russia. While you enjoyed a well-fed double life in London.

— He is an emperor; not a Bourbon. He is stronger than the Directors, the Convention. But the woman was a liability. He stood at this, turning his head from me.

— What are you saying, Henri?

— That she did our cause no good. She had no idea what she had mixed herself up in. She and her precious little cousin. They both played at being revolutionaries. Like so many.

— Good God, Henri! Tell me it is not true!

— That what is not true? Is it only now that you have understood?

— You told me you had done everything which could be done to save her.

— The *Patrie* above all, Richard; that is what I swore and it is to that I hold true. I have no other passion. *Vivre libre ou mourir*.

— And for your notions of freedom you deprived an innocent woman of her life!

— It happens, Richard. In revolution as in war, the weakest goes to the Wall.

I slumped on the rickety stool as he towered above me.

— Yes, Richard, I let her go to her death. She had nothing to offer the Revolution.

— And Antoine? Do not tell me you let me believe it was Antoine who denounced her. I stood up, grasping him by the lapels of his stiff green coat. Tell me, was it her cousin who denounced her?

— It was not. It was, however, convenient that you believed so. And you have to admit, Richard, that you needed no persuasion to contrive that idea; it was in your head already.

— So we condemned an innocent man?

— You and Price. I merely sat at the table and made suggestions.

I left him then. I felt no more pity for him, nor a shred of friendship. He was indeed my enemy. But when the gate clanged shut behind me, I felt it was I who was being locked in, and not the traitor.

The sky as I left that awful place and walked sadly down Old Bailey was the dull grey of old lead, as if washed on with a brush, the spindle branches of leafless trees, water-sodden from recent rain, like Fuseli's Skiagrams against it. Such beauty in the air, not a hundred feet from where sat the blackest monster I have ever known. I mourned the man he had once been, the friendship we had shared. Little compares with the friendship of youth, forged in crisis. And yet – O God! – that friendship a Chimaera, and neither of us the man the other thought him to be.

81.

He'd had such high hopes for his notebook, but the girl had trumped him. Perhaps he'd miscalculated. He'd rather arrogantly gambled on the fact that there was little she could know which he did not also know about Richard Turnbull's life. And that had been his mistake; she had somehow got hold of a genuine Turnbull notebook, in which the traitor revealed much that was otherwise secret about his life. So she said. So very obscure, Richard Turnbull and Henri de Saint-Gilles. It had seemed a great stroke of luck to find an academic working on the subject. But stupid, perhaps, to

hide behind Julia Dalton. And now she knew that his notebook was a forgery, even though he'd denied it.

But couldn't he write his own book? An account of Richard Turnbull and his relationship with Henri de Saint-Gilles. He had a great deal of source material. The girl didn't have all the answers. The problem was that Peter's most significant material had been relayed to him by Saint-Gilles himself and that was not a respectable source in the eyes of the world, publishers included. Though surely he'd find someone who'd be prepared to take it on, if he made it sensational enough. But he wanted it to be a work of scholarship. So narrow-minded, this rationalist society; he could teach them a thing or two about listening to your sources – really listening. Not just to ghosts like Saint-Gilles, but to the voices within yourself, the heart's irrational promptings.

He'd believed her when she told him about her notebook. There was no reason to doubt her. Where had she got it from? She was missing a lot, though. It was obvious: Turnbull had concocted the stories about his mother and the preacher Ezekiel Juggins. He was a liar, and liars make up stories.

He was tired. He rested his head on the leather wing of his chair. So many months, so many years of sitting up late, going without sleep in the service of his friend. The café to run; two lives to lead. It had exhausted him. If he could just sleep for as long as he wanted, without having to open his eyes, without being dragged once more into providing food and drink, baking bread, making soups, putting together sandwiches and paninis. Serving, clearing up. Without bearing the burden of his friend's honour, the constant fear of letting him down. He could sleep for a month, a year, for ever.

When he opened his eyes again, the candle had burnt low but Saint-Gilles had arrived. Peter struggled to sit up, his limbs aching, his tongue dry in his mouth. He felt odd, shivery, as if he was coming down with flu. His right arm was numb.

What have you got to say for yourself? He wasn't sure if he'd said the words aloud or merely thought them.

But the ghost was stern. Pointing his finger at Peter, he said, 'You have let me down.' Quietly, as if even in this enclosed and private place the words could not be spoken out loud.

‘I’ve let *you* down? I think that’s a bit rich,’ said Peter, running a hand over his face. He reached for the decanter, poured himself another glass of wine, took a large gulp and swallowed hard.

‘You have failed me.’

‘On the contrary,’ said Peter, ‘you’ve failed me. I believed in you and you betrayed me. You turn out to have been a traitor after all.’

Silence. Henri stared sullenly at Peter.

‘You could have told me about Turnbull and his mother, said Peter. ‘How do you think I could do a proper job if you didn’t give me all the information?’

‘I didn’t know about it.’ Saint-Gilles turned his head to one side, as if looking at Peter were too much of an effort. Peter blinked. Just for a moment the ghost had a look of his mother: mocking and full of displeasure.

‘What do you mean, you didn’t know about it? You were his friend.’

‘For a while. But he didn’t tell me everything. Evidently.’

‘But you’re a ghost.’

‘And that means I know everything? I’m a ghost, not God. Besides, you knew what you needed to know.’

‘No, I didn’t. If I’d known about Turnbull’s mother I’d have been able to do a better job. But there’s something even more important. Why the hell didn’t you tell me I’m descended from that traitor? Or are you going to tell me you didn’t know that either? That he was the father of your sister’s child.’

‘It wasn’t something you needed to know. It would have affected your ability to carry out your task.’

‘And couldn’t I have been the judge of that? It is after all a vital part of my history. Don’t you think I had a right to know?’

‘And who are you to be making demands like that? Just a little man, Peter Marchmont, the boy who couldn’t make friends, the boy whose father abandoned him. I rescued you from all that. From the self-doubt and the self-hatred. I gave you a sense of confidence, a purpose. I gave your life meaning. Wasn’t that worth the sacrifice?’

‘And it was your decision, was it? To hide things from me? To let me live in ignorance?’

‘What’s a little ignorance if it brings you contentment and certainty? Far better than doubt and knowledge.’

‘But now I know it anyway. That Turnbull is more my ancestor than you are. That’s who I am. I can never go back on that knowledge. It changes me.’

‘You believe it, then? You can’t always believe what you’re told, you know. The uninitiated will always throw obstacles in your path.’

‘Just listen to you. I have to believe it. The girl has proof – can I ignore that? You let me believe a lie.’

‘It wasn’t a lie. You are descended from me, through Raoul.’

‘But you let me believe …’

‘You believed it yourself. All I wanted was someone who would clear my name, bring me justice.’

‘And all I wanted was a friend.’

‘Someone to buffer you from the outside world.’

‘What?’

‘You aren’t strong enough to live a normal life are you, Peter?’

‘I live a perfectly normal life. Or perhaps you’re unaware of that?’

‘Downstairs in the café, yes. But it’s an act, isn’t it? A mask. Not a real life. You cease to exist once you’re outside the Blue Teapot, don’t you?’

‘I’ve not noticed you outside the café, either. Come down with me at eight o’clock this morning and I’ll introduce you to some of my customers.’

‘You know that’s not possible.’

‘You know that’s not possible,’ Peter mimicked. ‘Are you frightened of seeing the site of your arrest?’

‘Not as frightened as you are of the world at large.’

‘That’s a cruel thing to say. If it weren’t for me, you’d have had no chance. It’s not been easy, you know, trying to right your wrongs.’

‘Yet you’ve failed at that too, haven’t you?’

‘Just give me time. I can make it right.’

Saint-Gilles stood up, walked to the desk and stood looking down at Peter.

‘Never made the grade, have you, Marchmont? Always some obsession to deflect from the fact of your oddness. Who’d sit scribbling in a dark attic if he had a life to live? A real life.’

‘Yet you were quite happy to have me scribbling on your behalf.’

‘You didn’t come up with the goods, though, did you?’

‘Whose grade have I never made? You’re just like all the rest – laying down rules, then getting irritated when I don’t follow them. Well, listen to this. Perhaps it’s time I started to live my own life. Not at the beck and call of a sodding ghost. My own life. Me, Peter. Am I worthless just because I’m not the same as everybody else? I’ve made a success of the café.’

‘And your criminal activities? Buying stolen goods. Commissioning burglaries.’

‘I never heard you complaining about that before. It was for your benefit, after all. I won’t need to do it any more, will I?’

‘He’ll be back, though.’

‘Who’ll be back?’

‘That policeman.’

‘How do you know about him?’

‘How do you think? Who do you think I am, Peter?’

‘He doesn’t know a thing.’

‘He suspects, though, doesn’t he? And he’s only got to come up here and he’ll find all the evidence he needs, won’t he?’

Peter finished his wine and poured another. He thought of the glass he’d thrown at the wall a week ago, and thought he’d like to throw one at Saint-Gilles now. God, he felt awful. He put the decanter back in the sideboard, made a show of tidying the desk.

‘I’m going to bed now. You can do what you like.’

‘So. Taking your ball home to play.’

‘It’s not perhaps such a bad idea.’

‘Poor little Peter. Solitary as ever.’

‘Just get lost,’ he said and turned away, locking the door after him.

82.

The trial of Henri Jacques de Saint-Gilles, for High Treason

30th January 1813

XX.

Mr Justice Hobbs: Henry Saint-Gilles is now at liberty to speak for himself, or if he would prefer, his counsel may speak on his behalf. His counsel will examine any witnesses that he has.

Henri de Saint-Gilles: I stand before the court an innocent and wounded man. A refugee from my own country, in which a terrible revolution was raging, I sought refuge in this land. I was born into an aristocratic family, though not one of great consequence, in a region of France known as Poitou. Early in the year 1793, I was obliged to flee my estate in fear of my life; an estate which was later confiscated. During the intervening twenty years, I have not returned to my native country; nor have I had contact with revolutionaries of any kind in England.

Upon my arrival here I possessed nothing save a few books I had carried with me. Used to moving between my two châteaux in France, which were in calm and peaceful districts of the countryside, and visiting from time to time my family's town house in Paris, I was in this country reduced almost to beggary, living from Hand-to-Mouth in a couple of bare rooms. Yet I was content to live by my own efforts in return for the safety and the freedom offered here; I willingly worked for my living, teaching French and dancing to the children of English families. I was always received with kindness, and on many an occasion was praised for my diligence and my success with my pupils. By hard work over the years, I was able to amass enough money to live as a gentleman. Then, one day, as I was walking down the Strand, I happened upon Mr Turnbull, an old friend of

my youth, whose acquaintance I had made in Paris during the turbulent days of 1793. We renewed our friendship and I moved from London, where my health suffered from the miasmas, to lodge near him in Clapham. There I lived peaceably until, in November of last year, I was unaccountably and mistakenly apprehended. Mr Turnbull has turned out to be a wolf in sheep's clothing and, for some reason inexplicable to me, turned against me, who has never been anything more to him than a friend. I am as innocent of the crime of which I am accused, as the honourable judge who presides over this court.

Mrs. Haspinall was sworn and examined by Mr Fothergill, for the prisoner.

Mr Fothergill: Who are you?

Mrs Haspinall: My name is Mary Haspinall. I am the widow of Mr James Haspinall, and own a house in the High-street at Clapham.

Mr Fothergill: The house in which Mons. de Saint-Gilles lived?

Mrs Haspinall: That is so. Number 10. Since the death of my husband, I have been in straightened circumstances. Thus I lived in the downstairs rooms, and Mr Gilles rented the upper floors.

Mr Fothergill: How long have you known Mons. de Saint-Gilles?

Mrs Haspinall: For more than two years, since he came to live in my house.

Mr Fothergill: And what sort of a tenant has he been during that time?

Mrs Haspinall: As good a tenant as any landlady could wish for. He was very seldom noisy. Only, in fact, when his friends came to visit.

Mr Fothergill: And might you comment upon his character?

Mrs Haspinall: He was a real Christian gentleman; very gentle and courteous. He used to take tea with me perhaps once every week, and talked with such kindness, and was happy to listen, too, to what an old woman had to say.

Mr Fothergill: Would you say you could trust him?

Mrs Haspinall: Yes, indeed. I would have trusted him with my life.

Mr Fothergill: It must therefore have come as a shock to you, Mrs Haspinall, when he was apprehended for a traitor and a spy?

Mrs Haspinall: I've never had greater, sir, except at the death of poor Mr Haspinall. I would not have thought it of him.

Mr Fothergill: Finally, Mrs Haspinall, could you comment upon the state in which Mons. de Saint-Gilles kept his rooms?

Mrs Haspinall: He kept them as neat as I did mine. He was a very fastidious gentleman, insisting that Ann, my servant, went up every day without fail to clean and set things in order. He was willing to pay extra for that.

Mr Fothergill: Thank you, Mrs Haspinall.

Mr Turner was sworn and examined by Mr Fothergill for the prisoner.

Mr Turner: I am Joseph Turner. I am the landlord of Turner's Coffee-House which is situated on Green-street in Clapham.

Mr Fothergill: And you are acquainted with the prisoner?

Mr Turner: He has been a frequent guest in my coffee-house.

Mr Fothergill: For how long?

Mr Turner: About two years and a half.

Mr Fothergill: Has he ever in that time been troublesome or disorderly?

Mr Turner: Never. Men often turn quarrelsome when they have too much drink inside them; I have witnessed many a brawl. But Mr Saint-Gilles always behaved like a gentleman. I do not mean to say that he never shouted, or was never boisterous – every man is thus from time to time – but he was never out of measure, either in his drinking or in his actions.

Mr Fothergill: And what of his character?

Mr Turner: His character was that of a gentleman. Mons. Henri was very kind to my wife when I was laid up with a fever and she had charge of the coffee-house.

Mr Fothergill: How was he kind to her?

Mr Turner: She has a game hip and he carried water for her on occasion. He was willing to wait a little longer for his food or drink, unlike many of the other customers.

Mr Fothergill:	And were you present on the night of Mr Saint-Gilles's arrest?
Mr Turner:	I was.
Mr Fothergill:	Can you tell us how he behaved on that occasion?
Mr Turner:	He behaved as a gentleman who has been wrongly accused.
Mr Fothergill:	Did he struggle with his captors?
Mr Turner:	Not at all. He went with them quietly, as if he knew it were an error and trusted that all would be settled in time.

83.

He couldn't face going up to the attic after he'd cleared away in the Blue Teapot. No point now; there was nothing for him up there any more. He didn't feel like eating either; he poured a glass of water and returned to the café. He'd sit for a while, until they came to take him away, here in his ancestor's seat, in the corner by the dimpled bow-window. Henri was right; he was a failure. But you failed me too, Henri.

He'd lived for Henri. Lived in and through him. The approach of late autumn, as October arrived, the nights drew in and the clocks went back, had been the high-point of his year. Wind and rain and hour upon hour of darkness. And then he would come, like Father Christmas in the night; the blessed presence, the Other who loved him.

The fat boy with the slow tongue, who could walk into a room and not be noticed, as if he were made of glass, had forged for himself an identity. Peter who bakes such wonderful cakes. Mr Marchmont who always has a polite word for everyone, the doddery and the old as well as the young and intelligent. Yet, like a cloaked spy in a dark alley, he had always looked out at the world from under the cover of a broad-brimmed hat and felt that he belonged to it only tenuously. Beneath the cloak and the hat lurked the other Peter, who at the end of each day stole to the dark, windowless room he had created and submerged himself in another man's life, another man's epoch. It was this Peter who conversed with the ghost of his ancestor, who concocted the story which would vindicate him. For he had been without identity, slipping unnoticed through the world; bruised and sad, conscious of his base fleshliness as

well as his insubstantiality. Henri had rescued him. In the Blue Teapot, under Saint-Gilles's guiding presence, Peter had come alive.

He'd sit here a while, in the corner, where Henri had been arrested. Turner's coffee house. Would they really come and get him? Had Carter actually put two and two together and seen through him? Or was that overly melodramatic? Out of the corner of his eye, he thought he saw the Detective Sergeant standing by the door, but when he turned his head there was no one there. The door was locked, anyway; when the sergeant came he'd have to be let in. Either that or batter the door down.

He'd always known they'd come and get him, sooner or later. The game was up. In one sense it had been up for years. Not just the forgeries. Yet how could Carter have known about them? Even Drue didn't know; he'd talked to no one about the notebook. Except the girl; and she didn't seem the type to go running to the police.

But his whole life had been an elaborate forgery, an attempt to fashion a valid shape out of the jumble of disparate fragments he'd been dealt. Too late now to change tack. He'd played his hand and been trumped. No cards left. Too old, too tired to start again. What had he achieved? Fulfilment always seemed to have eluded him. A dropout from university, a failed marriage and a failed business, a string of jobs. The Blue Teapot; surely he could take credit for that? But that was a triumph inseparable from his relationship with Saint-Gilles. The Blue Teapot was Saint-Gilles's locus and every stroke of work which Peter had ever performed there had been on his behalf. His ancestor had been his first thought on waking and his last thought before sleep for so many years that it was unthinkable now to live without him. It would be like cutting away a part of himself. Yet that was what he'd done the night before; cut himself off, as if he'd amputated an arm or a leg.

He rested his head against the worn oak panelling, staring ahead, his body limp and heavy. So heavy; as if all the burdens and anxieties of his life, all the striving and hiding, being one thing and another, had turned themselves into atoms in his flesh. All this. He ran the back of his hand feebly against one of the panels. A panel *he* might have touched, and Richard Turnbull, and their friend Montagu as they sat in the corner booth reading the papers and calling for coffee or punch or a dish of mutton stew.

Nothing left. Could he carry on, living in this empty place, serving tea and sandwiches, coffee and cake, as if nothing had happened? As if the whole fabric of his life had not been ripped apart and torn to shreds? Smiling genially, everything to

everybody, nothing to anybody. He'd believed in Saint-Gilles and his belief had been torn up and thrown back in his face. Henri had been his life, his insurance against death; for if Henri lived, surely Peter too would live on after his physical death?

But this friendship had gone the way of all others. Abandonment and betrayal. After all I've done for you. It's what his mother used to say to him. What he'd said to Stephanie.

He was getting drowsy. Something had snapped inside him, something that could never be put back together. The wind whipped and howled down the street, rattling the dimpled window panes and battering them with sudden gusts of rain. That it should come to this. His eyes, heavy-lidded now, saw not the Blue Teapot's interior but a phantasmagoria of images, the flickering of an old film-reel played at high speed. The copper beech hedge outside his childhood home in Primrose Hill, lit intermittently by the blue flashes from the police car; Detective Sergeant Carter quizzing him about the attic, his eyes saying, 'I know everything about you'; his playroom with the scuffed settee and the floor littered with books; Stephanie, the morning she told him she was going to divorce him; Henri striding across Regent's Park to catch up with him, his breeches creamy-white under his green riding coat, his cravat striped in red and blue. Julia Dalton holding out her hand across the table at the Spanish Galleon and saying confidently, 'John Selby?'

84.

The street was unusually busy for that time in the evening. Before she turned the corner she sensed the flash of a blue light; then saw the police car, silent, parked at an angle at the end of the road. A cordon of blue-and-white tape across the street; the same words, POLICE DO NOT CROSS, repeated again and again. Several people milling about opposite the Blue Teapot. The blue light, swivelling rhythmically, gave the scene an eerie radiance. Surely they'd not come to arrest him for the forgery? How could anyone have known? And all this, for that? What else had he been up to?

She walked up to the tape and tried to peer round the uniformed constable who blocked the entrance of the café.

'Can I help you, Miss?' He looked no older than the new group of students who'd moved into the downstairs flat a couple of months ago.

‘What’s going on in there?’

‘Sorry, I can’t say. Can I ask you what your business is?’

‘I just came to see Peter – Peter Marchmont.’

‘Know him, do you?’

‘Yes. I’m a … a sort of friend.’

She heard the high whine of a siren in the distance, getting louder and louder as it approached. Then silence as an ambulance came to a halt in front of the café. The constable pushed Julia to one side, gently but firmly. She joined the other bystanders.

‘Well, that’s my morning cappuccinos down the drain. God, what a waste.’

‘He might be OK, you never know.’

‘Such a lovely man, he was. Always had time for you.’

‘What’s happened?’ asked Julia.

‘Word is, he’s topped himself.’

‘What? Peter?’

‘Yeah. Don’t make sense, do it? Makes you wonder what goes on in people’s heads.’

‘Did the police say that? That he killed himself?’

‘No. They don’t say nothing. Could have been an accident, I suppose.’

‘Or a heart attack.’

‘Wonder what’ll happen to the old place now. Listed building, it is, dates back to the eighteenth century. He told me all about it, he was into all that sort of thing. God, I’ll miss those cakes. Oh my God, look.’

The paramedics were negotiating a wheeled stretcher through the narrow door of the Blue Teapot; upon it lay the prostrate form of Peter Marchmont. No waves now. All dead particles.

‘Poor sod.’

‘The crazy bugger. What did he want to go and do that for?’

Julia felt tears pricking her eyes, walked down the next street and back again in the dark November night, spots of icy rain dribbling from the clouded sky. The ambulance left, its siren wailing. Everything seemed to be in slow motion. The constable called out to her. She’d said she was a friend; did Mr Marchmont have any family that she knew of? She said she didn’t know; he’d never mentioned anyone. They might need a statement; he’d need to take her name and address. He then took details from the other bystanders; except those who’d slunk off.

*

The next evening after work she made a detour to the police station in Clapham, where a constable led her to an interview room. It was the first time she'd seen the inside of a police station; she wondered what Miles would make of this turn of events. The constable coughed and said he was very sorry, but Peter Marchmont had been dead on arrival at the hospital the previous evening. He then proceeded to take her statement. How long had she known Mr Marchmont? In what capacity? What sort of a person was he? Had he ever appeared unstable? Had he talked about family? Had she seen him recently? How had he seemed on that occasion? Why had she gone to the Blue Teapot that night? Now, if you'd just like to read over what I've written and if you're happy with it, sign at the bottom.

She read over the page of schoolboy handwriting and was half-inclined to say that she would never put her name to anything so ungrammatical and badly-punctuated, but she thought better of it and scrawled her name with her own ball-point at the bottom of the page.

She'd lain awake most of the night, thinking about Peter Marchmont and wondering how much she was going to tell the police. In the end, she realized there was little she could conceal. If they searched his flat, there was no knowing what they'd find. So she told everything, except for her suspicions about the notebook.

When she got home she made a large strong coffee and read the last entry in Richard Turnbull's Greek journal. Better than brooding over Peter Marchmont's death.

> Feby. 3d, 1813.
>
> 'I loath many men; I have killed none.' – how those words now mock me! I have killed my friend – if not directly, at least by my actions. My friend, a flesh-and-blood man who sat with me at table and dined off Mrs Turner's scrag-end; who rode with me to London on his brown bay; a man who laughed with me and whom I loved. He was the man with whom Montagu and I once – not two years ago – entered into a competition, to determine who could tie his cravat in the neatest knot in the space of three minutes. We stood in turn before Henri's dressing-mirror, the other two counting off the seconds. Miss Fitzroy, at whose aunt's house we dined that afternoon, was called upon to be the judge of our efforts; if memory serves me right, she chose Will, whose knot she said was modest and elegant as well as neatly-tied. Henri's she said

had the most of neatness about it, but was too elaborate and inflexible; and yours, Richard, though the most pleasing, yet, like your self, has rather too much of the slap-dash to be the victor in this competition.

Yet he was not my friend at all. – And that is perhaps the worst of this horrible business.

I have killed no man with my bare hands, yet I have caused the death of more than one.

Henri.

Antoine.

Rosine.

Death alone is the victor in this business. My unknown child, dead also.

Sophie.

But that I should have been so deceived! These past three years a falsehood.

I wanted Antoine's death, though it was an error of fact to want it. He was innocent.

I did not wish for Henri's death. Why did he refuse my help; why insist on staying in England? Did he think to turn the tables upon me? In the end the case he pleaded held little substance. Did he think I would not go through with the task? Or did he rely upon the protection of someone who did not, in the end, protect him?

My despairing grief, that night in February 1794, was a filthy lens through which I viewed events awry. I had not possession of the facts, and it distorted those I knew.

Perhaps we are not who we think ourselves to be. A a juxta-position of good and evil, the dappling of light and darkness under a tree on a sunny evening.

And there the journal ended. The last few pages were blank; he must have abandoned it after Saint-Gilles's execution. Regret, sorrow and death.

Her phone rang; an unknown number. A journalist from one of the Clapham local papers. ‘No, I’m not prepared to give an interview,’ she said. ‘And please don’t ring me again.’

Feeling like a criminal, she packed her small suitcase. A few clothes, her laptop, the two notebooks. After her day of teaching at the Academy the next day, light-headed from lack of sleep, she took a bus to Vauxhall and the tube to St Pancras, where she bought a ticket for Paris.

85.

The trial of Henri Jacques de Saint-Gilles, for High Treason
30th January 1813
XXI.

Mr Ratcliffe: summing-up for the prisoner.

The unhappy Gentleman at the bar, who is called upon to answer with his life a charge of treason, stands before you, an alien in your country, a refugee from his own. Yet I need hardly remark, that he may depend with full confidence, not only upon his innocence, but upon the humane disposition towards all, which is the mark of English justice embodied in you his jury. I therefore address to you, gentlemen, some remarks which may serve to remind you of the import of the evidence brought before you today.

In the prisoner’s being known as both Mons. de Lessac and Mons. de Saint-Gilles, we are dealing, not with the use of a fictitious name or *alias*, but with a French custom which allows the use of two names. Though he was born Saint-Gilles, he later inherited a property, the Seigneurie de Lessac, from an uncle, and under French law was entitled to take the name which accompanied it.

You have heard from his own mouth, how he was forced to flee the land of his birth as a consequence of that terrible revolution – of which the war we currently wage against the upstart Buonaparte is the direct result – and live as an exile in poverty in this land. Consider, gentlemen, if any of you were cast upon the mercy of a French court, would you not hope for both justice and mercy at its hands?

Two of the significant items of evidence against Mons. de Saint-Gilles are the matter of his handwriting and the testimony of Mr Price, and about these I would wish

to say a few words to direct your thoughts. Can it be certain, that the letters obtained by Mr Price and given to Mr Turnbull, were written by Mons. de Saint-Gilles? On the one hand, a man's hand-writing may easily be mistaken, all the more so as all Frenchmen may be presumed to have a similar style of hand, more different from our own, than it is from that of each other. Hand-writing in itself, especially in so serious a case, must always form a dubious basis for conviction. And on the other hand, such writing may – as the main prosecution witness himself has shown us – be fraudulently imitated. Mr Turnbull owns to having forged the prisoner's handwriting during his visit to Paris in October of last year. Can you be sure, gentlemen, that the letters obtained by Mr Price, allegedly from the prisoner, were not also a fabrication? Think carefully before you convict a man of such a serious crime on such fragile evidence.

It has been established, that Mr Turnbull, the prisoner's main accuser, did not see him at the house in Litchfield-street; is it not therefore unwise to assume, that M. de Saint-Gilles ever set foot in that house, and thence to deduce that he was the spy who operated there? Mr de Saint-Gilles is known, moreover, to be a man of the utmost fastidiousness; is it likely, that he could have spent even a short time every month in the filthy and rat-infested hovel described by Mr Faden?

I turn now to Mr Price. In this person you may believe that you have a witness whose integrity is somewhat blemished and whose testimony is not entirely to be believed, even under oath; and in that I would be in agreement with you. A man who has admitted a double treachery to his adoptive country: first by selling intelligence to the French and subsequently, on tiring of that agreement because his remuneration was insufficient, by making plans to sell information to the Americans.

But that is not all. Mr Turnbull, as well as Mr Price, has shown himself to be a man who, as Mr Fothergill has so eloquently put it, inhabits the murkiest shadows; a man who has forsaken those ancient English qualities of candour and honesty. Here we have, gentlemen, a witness who might accurately be delineated as a monster, no less than his accomplice; a man whose whole life has been an unblushing caricature of the honest and upright life of the Englishman, who scorns duplicity. Heavens! May the prisoner be condemned upon the testimony of such a pair of unreliable witnesses?

I implore you, gentlemen, to consider carefully the evidence you have heard today, and do not too hastily determine the life of this poor friendless émigré. If there is any reason at all for you to doubt that evidence, then you must pronounce him innocent.

*

Mr Solicitor-General: summing-up for the Crown.

Gentlemen of the jury, you are trying the Prisoner for the crime of high treason, which the law describes in two ways: compassing or imagining the death of the King, and adhering to, or assisting, the enemies of the Kingdom. In fact, these two are usually identical; for whoever attempts to assist the enemies of this Kingdom is considered by law to imagine the death of the King because the purpose of the enemies of this Kingdom is certainly the destruction of our King. We may take for granted, therefore, that whoever sends intelligence to a country at war with this, does adhere to the kingdom's enemies. The question you have to decide today, then, is whether such an act is proved.

The specific acts here stated by the prosecution, as constituting the prisoner's crime, may be given in summary thus:

That the prisoner gathered intelligence regarding the state of the defences of this country and the readiness of our ships for war, with the intention of sending that intelligence to the enemy. That he in matter of fact sent such intelligence to France, employing Mr Barclay and his cutter for that purpose. That he employed any number of men, of which Mr Price was one, to gather that intelligence; in short that he ran a ring of spies from a house in Litchfield-street, while appearing to live quietly as a gentleman in Clapham. This double life he managed successfully for at least two years and a half. And finally, that he hired a dissenting preacher to carry letters to French prisoners-of-war in the north of this country; letters which, as well as bearing innocuous news of the prisoners' families, carried also information relating to a forthcoming insurrection.

Any one of these acts would be sufficient for a charge of high treason; but taken together, they represent a flagrant contempt of this country and its King.

You have been told by my learned Friend that John Price is a traitor to his adoptive country; you may indeed consider, gentlemen, that his actions have been misguided. Let me point out, however, that this does not alter the truth of what Mr Price has today brought to light; an act by which he might be considered to have made some recompence for his earlier misdeeds. Mr Turnbull, too, has been called a monster and a dweller in murky shadows; but I would remind you, gentlemen, of the nature of the case we deal with. It is not an ordinary man who can be set to catch a spy; for espionage by its very nature takes place only in those shadows of which my learned friend spoke so eloquently, yet so naïvely. It is not an honourable occupation, and the man who accepts the task of detecting a spy is necessarily tainted by its deceit and duplicity, as the sweep is stained with the soot of a thousand chimneys.

Mr Ratcliffe has been obliged, in fact, to clutch at shadows, and it is hardly necessary for me to point out to you that the case for the defence is possessed of little evidence. The prisoner protests his innocence, yet the only witnesses he could call in his defence are a woman and the landlord of a coffee-house well known for its climate of Sedition.

There can be no doubt, that the Prisoner employed a ring of men to gather intelligence, which he subsequently sent to France over a period of at least two years; all the facts we have heard today support this assertion. And that is an explicit act of high treason, proving the prisoner's imagination (as the law calls it) of the death of the King and his adherence to the enemies of this our kingdom.

There are no more remarks which, at this late hour, I think it necessary to trouble you with; I will end with one reflection. It would not serve the justice of this country to send an innocent man to the gallows. It is incumbent upon you, therefore, as gentlemen of the jury, to do Mons. de Saint-Gilles justice; and, if in your judgement he is not proved guilty by the evidence heard here today, you must in God's name pronounce him innocent. But if, on the other hand, your judgements concur with mine; if the Prisoner is, in your opinion, proved guilty of these several acts of treason; then it is your duty to pronounce him guilty.

86.

It was eight-thirty when Julia rang the bell at the entrance to Mathias Fournier's apartment block. The automatic door opened unsteadily, as if it wasn't sure it wanted her to enter. In the lift she had a sudden fear that he might not be pleased to see her. But he'd have said so, wouldn't he, when she'd spoken to him earlier between St Pancras and Dover? He was at the door of his apartment to greet her, in jeans and dirty white socks and a black sweater.

'You look dreadful, Julia,' he said as he took her raincoat and hung it in the Louis XV armoire. 'Elegant, but dreadful.'

'They're my work clothes,' she said, looking down at her navy trouser suit. 'I came straight from the Academy.'

'Come through to the sitting room.' He propelled her to a leather chair on one side of the hearth. 'Wine or coffee? And how long is it since you've eaten?'

'A glass of wine, please. I ate at lunch time.'

‘Just a sandwich, I suppose.’

‘A banana.’

‘And before that?’

‘I’m not sure. Tea on Tuesday, I think. The day before yesterday.’ Was it really only the day before yesterday?

‘We can go out – though you don’t look as though you’re up to that.’ She shook her head. Already she was finding it hard to keep her eyes open.

‘What time were you up this morning?’

‘I never really got to bed. I didn’t sleep.’

‘And you taught today?’

She nodded.

He kissed the top of her head. ‘I’ll bring you something on a tray, then you can tell me about it. Shall I turn the music off?’

‘No, leave it on. It’s rather soothing.’

‘It’s Purcell, *A Fantasia on One Note*. An underrated composer, I think, your Purcell. A pity he died so young.’

‘There’s a story that he arrived home after a night out to find that his wife had locked him out of the house. He caught a chill and died.’

‘Such a disservice to music.’

Ten minutes later – or was it twenty? – he brought two omelettes sprinkled with herbs, a basket of bread and a bottle of wine.

‘You can cook as well,’ she said with a half-smile. ‘You really are too good to be true.’ She felt close to tears.

They ate in silence for a while, sitting on opposite sides of the fireplace like an old couple whose conversation had run out long ago and who now lived in a state of tolerant indifference. She began to relax in the warmth of the old room. His cello leant against one of the bookcases; there was no sign of a television set.

‘I confronted him,’ she said as she finished the last of her omelette.

‘Peter? The guy you thought had forged the notebook you showed me?’

She nodded. ‘Ten, eleven days ago. Then the night before last I went to see him. I felt I’d been a bit harsh on him. He runs a café. Ran a café; he’d just died. Some of the onlookers thought he’d committed suicide, but I found out later it was a massive stroke. I thought perhaps he’d killed himself because of what I’d said.’ She took a mouthful of wine. ‘He was an odd man. Not very nice, perhaps; but in a strange sort

of way I'd got to like him.' She looked up. Mathias was frowning at her, his dark eyebrows twisted in concentration.

'I never really trusted him, but I felt sorry for him. And now I can't help thinking that, if I hadn't been so hard on him, if I'd handled it better, he might still be alive.'

'You can't know that. If it was a stroke, it must have been coming for some time.'

She listened to the sound of the traffic on the street below. 'I was harsh with him and he was very angry.'

'Because you'd accused him of forgery?'

'Not just that. I did accuse him of forgery, but he didn't take it that badly, just argued over it. But then I was really stupid.'

'I can't imagine you being really stupid.'

'I was. Horribly tactless: I told him about Richard Turnbull being Raoul's father. I was so angry with him, I just didn't think.'

'And?'

'He was furious. He smashed a glass and stormed out. I should have realized how much it meant to him. I felt sorry for him afterwards; perhaps because his life's work had gone down the drain – and I've only just come to realize how much it meant to him. He was totally obsessed with bringing out his version of the truth.'

'Which was a fabrication?'

'At least in part.' She rested her head against the soft leather of the chair. 'I can't say one hundred per cent that Saint-Gilles wasn't framed. But there's certainly no evidence for it.'

'Julia, can I ask you one thing?'

'Of course.'

'Just what are you doing here? Not that I'm not pleased to see you, but I'm not sure I understand.'

'For once in my life, I'm not sure I do either. I think I want to confess.'

'Confess?' He smiled. 'You know an atheist can't give absolution?'

'I don't think it's absolution I want. But I want there to be no dishonesty between us.'

He grimaced. 'You told a man the truth. Perhaps you were a little tactless, but that's hardly a crime.'

'It's not just that. There's more.'

'Go on.' He leant back in his chair and stretched his legs out.

‘I may have been right about the forgery, but it was only by a monumental coincidence. As you remarked, it was skilfully done. It was only because I had the other notebook that I could detect the discrepancies.’

‘And?’

‘I’d sort of stolen it.’

‘Sort of stolen it?’

‘It’s complicated.’

‘It always is.’

‘I’d agreed to buy a certain number of documents for a large sum of money; it was a rip-off really, but I just had to have them. I slipped the notebook in as well without negotiating over it.’ She stretched her hands out to the fire. ‘But if I hadn’t taken it, he’d have come by it – though I didn’t know that at the time – and I’d have been none the wiser. His forgery might well have succeeded, then. It was only because my notebook contradicted his that I got suspicious. His other claims – that Saint-Gilles was framed by Richard Turnbull, for example – would have been unverifiable, at least with the information we both had available.’

‘But you stole it only by a fairly strict definition of steal.’

‘And I’ve dropped Miles in it too.’

‘Miles? What has he got to do with it?’

‘That’s complicated too.’

The constable had been ushering her out of the interview room when she’d turned to him and said, ‘If you need information about Peter Marchmont, you could do worse than contact Detective Sergeant Carter at St John’s Wood. He probably knows far more about the man than I do.’

‘It could land him in trouble,’ she said to Fournier. ‘It was just an impulse; I was upset about Peter and angry that Miles had been interfering. He followed Peter home from one of our meetings, then checked up on him to see if he had a criminal record. But it wasn’t a very nice thing of me to do.’ The music stopped and she closed her eyes for a few moments. ‘But I suppose what I really want to say is this: Peter was dead when I saw him, when they wheeled him out of the café. It shook me up, I suppose. Life’s too short for beating about the bush.’ She passed her hands briefly over her face. ‘I want you to be aware of who I am. What I am. So that, whatever happens between us, our relationship will be based on some sort of transparency.’

‘You’re obviously not unaware of the irony in that statement?’

‘That I predicate my life on ambiguity, spend my time researching a man who seems to have possessed multiple identities, then come and talk about honesty and transparency? Well, life is full of irony.’

‘And it puts me in a difficult position.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘It means I need to be completely honest with you. I’m not sure how to tell you this, Julia.’

‘Tell me what?’

‘I’ve accepted a position in the United States. I’ll be leaving in January.’

She sat silent, staring at the last drop of wine in her glass.

‘Of course, it doesn’t mean it’s over between us.’

‘Maintaining a relationship across the Channel might be viable. The Atlantic’s another matter, don’t you think?’

‘You could always get a job there too.’

‘You know it’s the last place I’d want to live. And how long has this been on the cards?’

‘Six months, a year. I need a fresh start. A totally fresh start. Paris is too full of associations. I’m sorry if I’ve misled you. I should perhaps have told you earlier, but there never seemed to be a right time.’

‘Where in the States?’

‘Princeton.’

‘Well, that’s all right; I’d hate to think of your talent mouldering in some tin-pot American backwater. Could I have another glass of wine?’

She slept, a deep dreamless sleep, under the soft duck-down quilt in the huge bed, his arm around her. The next morning he brought her a bowl of coffee, and she heard the front door close quietly. She got up, packed her suitcase and took the metro to the Gare du Nord. So long ago, that Sunday she had sat next to him in his car all the way to Ruffec, a hot sunny day in July. They’d stopped at a roadside café at lunch time, eaten moules frites under an awning. As she wheeled her suitcase towards the Eurostar terminal she saw the black Toyota disappearing in the traffic, a dwindling speck in her mind’s eye.

*

When she got home she sat at her desk with her head on her hand, staring at the wall, till the room went dark around her. Then she got out her files. Her work on Richard Turnbull was nearly finished. Work, real work, the silent foray into a world of ideas and thought; a world of pain and hardship and confusion. But by some alchemy an antidote to her own pain and confusion. The cup of coffee at the desk, the handwriting she knew so well, so that it had become like that of a lover. A lover she observed at a distance of two hundred years, who turned his face away in a daily act of betrayal. Perhaps love was always like that. Soft slippers or tragedy.

She put the kettle on, took Montagu's *Memoir* from her bookshelf and read his account of Richard Turnbull's death.

> I next saw Richard in March of the year 1846. He stayed with me for a week, helping me with my version of Horace, and we argued companionably over the treachery of Plancus and the difficulties of translation. Though he still possessed the same fiery mind, Richard's body had slowed; he complained of aches in his limbs and a lethargy sometimes came over him, during which he would sit and stare through the window or at the fire burning in the grate. It was as if he saw beyond those superficial objects to a world beyond; whether of memory or of imagination, I know not. I suggested that he install himself in my house; nothing would have afforded me greater pleasure than to have had this best of all friends permanently under my roof, to while away our later years with reading and translation and ardent discussion. But he would not hear of it; not, he said, because he spurned my company; but because he could not, even in age, remain settled. He felt, too, that some opprobrium attached to Clapham – a place which, though different from what it had been more than thirty years previously, still carried for him memories of an episode he could never forget. Thus he set out once more in April and I never saw him again.
>
> It was only in December of that year, nearly six weeks after his death, that I learnt of it. The news was brought by a mutual friend, Mr Thomas Harris, who could report only that Richard was dead and buried near the Hertfordshire village of Boxmoor. I was much affected by this news, and being by that time a man of leisure (though concomitantly of reduced means) travelled to that place in order to visit his grave. I was half-tempted to take that new-fangled conveyance, the railway – I am told the journey can be made in little more than an hour – but I am too old for a means of transport which, in its speed and its dirtiness, is little short of monstrous.
>
> I spoke to the keeper of the inn on the road to St Albans, to which Richard had been carried the morning before he died. He had slept in a barn the previous night and

been found the next morning by the farmer's boy in a state of extreme weakness and delirium. The innkeeper's wife, who spoke well of him – he had been a sporadic visitor over the years – stated that consciousness had not returned; by the end of the day he had sunk quietly into death, although upon occasion he had shouted out names she did not recognise. She had retained his effects in a small box; I should take them, she said.

Such a pathetic sight: a few pens, his penknife, several books, a flageolet and his old fiddle, which had afforded us such enjoyment in years gone by. I found also two letters: one ancient, which he must have carried with him for the best part of his life; and another unfinished, addressed to me. I include the latter here; for it provides, in better words than mine, the most exact picture of my friend Richard Turnbull and of the peculiar quintessence of his life.

October 15th, 1846

My dear Will,

My candle gutters in this dark room. Winter draws in – this morning the sky a pale robin's-egg blue – an old man's blue, washed-out and hazy – a thick frost under my boots as I walked over the fields towards Harpenden; a desolate, cold stillness. It is my intention to see London once more before I die, to walk in its endless streets among thousands upon thousands who care not one jot for me. For I will die soon, Will, of that I am certain.

The penknife which lies on the table before me, given to me by my father on my thirteenth birthday and which I have carried everywhere, speaks of a life I once possessed, a paradise I once inhabited and from which I was ejected. Since then I have, it seems, lived several lives, of some of which I dare not speak.

I have finished nothing; nor will I now. My hand, swollen round my pen, struggles to reach the end of the line; my mind is dark, my thoughts indistinct. What have I achieved? So long ago, that June morning when I walked the streets of London in a whirlwind of passion. Such high ideals! How can I have experienced such depth of feeling and achieved so little? What wrong paths have I taken?

In July of this year I visited Lichfield, birthplace of Dr Johnson, a man whom, as you know, I greatly admire. Johnson achieved what I have not. I envy him that: he finished his task and saw it published, and I did not. True, my own Lexicon was a different and perhaps more difficult task: a comparison of five languages, with illustrative quotations; but the fact that it is unfinished weighs on and against me. My autobiography, too, is incomplete; not because my life is so, but because I have been unable to pull together its scattered fragments. I talk not of their physical scattering,

which is problematic enough – there is doubtless not a county in England which does not contain some scribbling of mine – but of my incapacity to forge them into a coherent account. Tom accuses me of indolence, but it is more that I am changeable, unfixed, a chameleon wanderer.

I have not sounded a pure note. I am a dissonance, a cacophony, a chari-vari of one thing and another.

Many years ago at the Royal Society I heard Dr Young posit that two rays of light might combine to produce darkness. Bunton, a friend of Jos's, voiced the thoughts of many when he said this was a ridiculous notion. But Time has proved Dr Young correct; and such have I been, I fear.

The candle gutters; like me, it is almost spent. I asked for two, but the innkeeper here is a mean old fellow. The nights are lengthening now. I shall leave at first light tomorrow, and hope to make Rockwood Park by nightfall. From thence I continue to London.

87.

A week later Julia was about to go to bed when the doorbell rang.

'Miles! What are you doing here?'

'Just came to bring you this.' He handed her a small brown envelope with the words 'Miss Dalton' written across it.

'What is it?'

'No idea. It was found in Peter Marchmont's flat. Thanks for dropping me in it, by the way.'

'I'm sorry, Miles; I shouldn't have done it. But you asked for it, didn't you? Would you like a coffee?'

'Wouldn't say no to a cup of tea.'

'I was right, you know,' he said, sitting on the sofa. 'About Marchmont.'

'What about him?'

'Up to no good, just like I told you.'

'And are you going to enlighten me?' She handed him his tea.

'Hods of stolen documents. In his attic.'

'His attic?'

‘He’d turned it into an office. Kitted it out like something in a costume drama. Quill pens, old ink wells, the lot. And he’d been using them. Barmy, if you ask me; I mean, who writes with quill pens these days? In a secret attic – he’d lied to me about it; said he never used it. I knew he was blagging me.’

‘You questioned him?’

‘Too right I questioned him. Couldn’t get anything on him, though. But after he died the local boys went in – they couldn’t trace a next of kin – and found piles of papers stashed away. Stolen from all over the place.’

‘What?’

‘Seems our dear Peter was getting his stuff nicked to order. Not everything, perhaps. But a lot of it.’

‘Oh God.’ She took a gulp of tea, looked at Miles. There were no obvious signs that he was enjoying himself. She drank in silence for a while.

‘How are you, Miles?’

‘Fine.’

‘Really?’

‘Yes, really. Actually, I’ve met someone.’

‘I’m glad.’

‘And you?’

‘Writing up my thesis.’

‘Personally, I meant.’

‘That is personal.’

‘Are you with someone?’

‘No. Except my dead spy.’

‘That’s just like you. You wouldn’t know why Marchmont would want quills, would you? Did he ever talk to you about that?’

‘No. He wasn’t very communicative. All we did was exchange documents and argue over our interpretation of them. And now I’m going to have to trace them all; but that’s perhaps my own fault. I don’t suppose you could help me, could you?’

‘Don’t know about that. I’ll see what I can do. I’ll give you the name of the investigating officer.’

‘I used to have a quill pen, you know. When I was about fourteen. Not a real one; it was just a feather with a metal nib stuck in it. But I used to sit writing in my

bedroom by candlelight, as if I was living in the eighteenth century. Perhaps that's what Peter was doing.'

After Miles had left, she opened the envelope. Inside was a letter, written in blue ball-point on A5 paper.

Miss Dalton,

You accuse me of forgery, and you are in a narrow sense correct; but what you mean by the word and what I mean by it are perhaps two different things.

When I reached a certain point in my life, I realised I must remake myself in my own image, if I wanted the world to take me seriously. So I covered over the gaping hole of the old Peter Marchmont and made up a new man: confident, urbane, affable. A mask under which the rest of me might function. We are all fictions, Miss Dalton, of greater or lesser artistry; it is just that some of us are more honest about it.

And why is what I have done so egregious? Are we not all forgers and counterfeiters? We make up our life, rewrite our past. Tell me you have not rewritten yourself as I have.

What is a mask? The common man will say that it is quite simply a disguise, a means of concealment; but, like all pronouncements of the common man, this is wide of the mark. The masks used by primitive peoples do not merely conceal and disguise, but bring forth a deeper reality. And my 'forgeries', as you call them, bring forth a deeper truth about my ancestor. They are a creative act. Like cooking, like alchemy. They express the truth, a truth not recorded but which existed nonetheless. I sought merely to set the record straight.

Peter Marchmont

88.

Coda: some years later

Professor Julia Dalton
15, Pepys Avenue
Greenwich
London SE10
Angleterre

She recognized the handwriting on the envelope and ripped it open at once, standing at her kitchen counter while her mid-morning coffee brewed.

30 July, 2028

Dear Julia,

As I mentioned when we spoke last, I am now back in Paris and will take up my new post at the Sorbonne later this year.

You will never guess what I have found in the Bibliothèque Nationale while researching material for my book on Collot d'Herbois and his acting troupe. I have enclosed copies (like the old days, n'est-ce pas?). A strange find – two letters addressed to a friend in England, but which for some reason never left Paris. An interesting coda to your doctoral thesis.

Your recent publication on William Godwin and the Treason Trials of 1794 was much admired at Princeton. Gregory Zweig (you met him on your last visit – the tall Californian with the white hair) said he would employ anyone on the strength of it – and was greatly disappointed when I told him that you have no desire to live in the States.

I have taken the liberty of also attaching a first draft of my article on revolutionary oratory which is to appear in *Temps et Histoire*. I think I have here excelled myself, but I would value your brutal honesty and punctiliousness.

Yours, MF

Two letters; her heart skipped a beat when she saw the handwriting; it was unmistakeably that of Richard Turnbull. She took the sheets and her cup of coffee up to her study, a converted attic which ran the full length of the house, full of light, with wooden floors and glass-fronted mahogany bookcases. On the top shelf of one

of the bookcases she found the files in which she'd stored her Turnbull notes. Speckled with dust, untouched since she'd bought the house ten years ago. She opened one of the files and placed it on her desk. Then she sat on the large white settee and read the two letters Fournier had sent her.

June 12th, 1825

Dear Montagu,

She is not here. I arrived two days ago; the château shut up and uninhabited, a couple of servants only – neither of whom knew me. The housekeeper, Mme Laforge, a woman of my own generation – who would therefore have been approximately twenty years of age when I was last here. Strange thought, that we are all changed – though the château and the land look much the same. A strange stirring came over me as I rode down the gravel drive – O God, I thought I might see the faces of the dead looking down on me from the upper windows. But there was nothing except the reflection of the setting sun.

— Mlle de Saint-Gilles no longer lives here, said the housekeeper; she went to live in Paris, seven years ago, her and the boy. He comes back sometimes, but she, never.

— She has a boy?

— Not hers; her nephew. Not that he's a boy any more.

— Her nephew?

— Her sister's child. We were supposed to keep up the pretence that it was the child of a distant relative who had died with no other close family, but we all knew he was Mlle Rosine's. And loved him all the more for that.

— Rosine's child?

— You knew her? It was a long time ago. A lovely girl. Such a sweet smile, always a word for her servants. So different from that sister of hers, Mlle Manon – Mlle de Lessac as she calls herself now. All harsh words and haughty looks.

— So Rosine – Mlle Rosine – had two children?

— No, Monsieur, only the one. Why do you ask that?

— Because the first child died, did he not?

— You are mistaken, Monsieur. Mlle Rosine died – many years ago, now. It broke my heart. I came with her from the Ile d'Oléron. She was kind to me, and I loved her.

— But the child? The child died, shortly after his mother?

— You are greatly mistaken, Monsieur. Who told you that?

— His uncle. Mlle Rosine's brother.

— M. Henri?

— Yes, M. Henri.

— He died too. In London, they say.

— It was in London that I knew him. It was there he told me of his sister's death. And his nephew's.

She sighed. So much suffering in those years. But why would he have told you that? He was teasing you.

— Raoul is alive?

She regarded me as if I were an idiot. Yes, of course Monsieur Raoul is alive, she said. He lives in Paris now, with his aunt, Miss Hoity-Toity. I do not regret her leaving, though not a day passes when I do not think of him. He comes back from time to time. She made the château over to him; didn't want anything more to do with it, if you ask me. So he looks after it – and us. A fine young man, tall and handsome. He has blue eyes like yours. Like yours, Monsieur.

My head was spinning – can you believe it, William? Raoul is alive. My son alive! I sat down on one of the chairs draped in white cloth – we were in the library, where I spent many a quiet hour, that summer. It had now a temporary, ghostly air to it, and I had a fleeting memory of coming upon Mlle de Saint-Gilles there one day, and of being forced to endure an hour of conversation with her before dinner, when I had hoped to be alone and read a book. Mme LaForge asked if I were ill and if she should fetch me a drink from the kitchen, but I said I was well and would find refreshment at the inn. I enquired the address in Paris of Mlle de Saint-Gilles and her nephew and took my leave, riding back down the drive as I had that day in July 1794. How silent the old château, clutching its secrets to itself. I did not look back, as I had not that other time.

I ride to Paris in the morning.

The second letter was dated a week later.

June 19th, 1825

My dear Will,

I arrived in Paris three days ago. You know with what trepidation and unease I have approached this journey. I have walked these streets only once since the bloody and furious days of 1794. Yesterday I stood in the place de la Révolution – since rebaptised place Louis XV – and saw, superimposed upon the commonplaces of today, that horror – that great and terrible machine which was never sated with blood. Did you know, Will, that at its fastest it could sever 35 heads in an hour? Such horrible efficiency.

We became inured to blood, in those days. It became a part of life. Hard to imagine now, unless one has stood beneath that towering monster.

But it was not to gaze at the scene of past horrors that I came here. There was, as you know, a purpose to my visit, one perhaps hardly less painful. I found Mlle de Lessac, as she now styles herself (I did not inform her of the use her brother made of that name) in a modest house in the rue de Vaugirard, not far from the Luxembourg. How many years have rolled between us! She received me with a superficial politeness which I thought ill concealed a wry and caustic detachment. I had explained in my letter to her that I had but recently discovered that my son was still alive and the circumstances surrounding my ignorance of that fact – yet it was not of Raoul that she wanted to speak.

— You signed your letter Richard Turnbull, she said. Is that your real name?

I said it was, thinking she sought to castigate me for having used a false one at Ruffec all those years ago. But she went on to ask, — You are not then Robert?

— No; Robert was my father. She seemed perplexed at this, as if I had told her something of great import. She repeated more than once, You are not Robert. Not Robert? An expression on her face like curdled milk. The years have sharpened her further, both in looks and in utterance. She is thinner than ever, gaunt, full of corners; her tongue as sharp as a poissarde's, though her turn of phrase more genteel. Fate has, I suppose, treated her unkindly.

The next day I met him, my son – though he is my son only in a very narrow sense: issue of my body, of my seed. I would nonetheless be proud to call this young man my son – he is a fine fellow, William, in looks as well as in character – though I can have no claim upon him. When he walked into the room I could discern his gentleness. He was courteous without being overbearing, and solicitous about my journey. I was at pains to explain that I learnt of his existence only at the moment at which I learnt of his spurious death; he retained my hand in his, and said most emphatically that I could not be held responsible for an untruth told by his uncle; that he was glad to meet me, although it saddened him that he had not known me sooner – as he knew it must sadden me too. He is not as tall as I am, but well-built and full of health; he has my dark hair and blue eyes, but the short retroussé nose of his mother. O God! What consequences flow from a few moments of passion! I thought only to forget, in Rosine's arms, that which had gone before. I used her ill.

Mlle de Lessac looked on at that first meeting with the sarcastic indifference which appears to be her usual mien; she then left us. We talked better without her there; he says she has been good to him, but I can see there is little warmth between them.

When I look back upon the events of my life, they appear to me a mishmash of horror. So much wrong I have done.

Yet this son of mine seems not to have inherited his father's curse. He is about to marry a wife; a young woman of moderate learning, who will no doubt produce healthy children and care for his needs, but who is not his intellectual equal. Yet I wish them well. His aunt does not approve of his choice; but he has ignored her displeasure. He plans to make his home at Ruffec and spend only part of the year in Paris, which no longer suits him.

And thus I took leave of that young man, my son, named after that Raoul Akermann who rode one night in a thunderstorm to the Château Ruffec, a fugitive from the Terror. That man, I suppose, was I.